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Maclaren's

EXPOSITIONS
of
HOLY SCRIPTURE

by
ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D., Litt.D.

Volume 8

The Acts,
Romans

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

THE ACTS

Chaps. I to XII

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THE ASCENSION

> 'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2. Until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the Apostles whom He had chosen: 3. To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: 4. And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. 5. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. 6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7. And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. 8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9. And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11. Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven. 12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey. 13. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. 14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.'—ACTS i. 1-14.

THE Ascension is twice narrated by Luke. The life begun by the supernatural birth ends with the supernatural Ascension, which sets the seal of Heaven on Christ's claims and work. Therefore the Gospel ends with it. But it is also the starting-point of the Christ's heavenly activity, of which the growth of His Church, as recorded in the Acts, is the issue. Therefore the Book of the Acts of the Apostles begins with it.

The keynote of the 'treatise' lies in the first words, which describe the Gospel as the record of what 'Jesus *began* to do and teach.' Luke would have gone on to say that this second book of his contained the story of what Jesus went on to do and teach after He was 'taken up,' if he had been strictly accurate, or had carried out his first intention, as shown by the mould of his introductory sentence; but he is swept on into the full stream of his narrative, and we have to infer the contrast between his two volumes from his statement of the contents of his first.

The book, then, is misnamed Acts of the Apostles, both because the greater number of the Apostles do nothing in it, and because, in accordance with the hint of the first verse, Christ Himself is the doer of all, as comes out distinctly in many places where the critical events of the Church's progress and extension are attributed to 'the Lord.' In one aspect, Christ's work on earth was finished on the Cross; in another, that finished work is but the beginning both of His doing and teaching. Therefore we are not to regard His teaching while on earth as the completion of Christian revelation. To set aside the Epistles on the plea that the Gospels contain Christ's own teaching, while the Epistles are only Paul's or John's, is to misconceive the relation between the earthly and the heavenly activity of Jesus.

The statement of the theme of the book is followed by a brief summary of the events between the Resurrection and Ascension. Luke had spoken of these in the end of his Gospel, but given no note of time, and run together the events of the day of the Resurrection and of the following weeks, so that it might appear, as has been actually contended that he meant, that the Ascension took place on the very day of Resurrection. The fact that in this place he gives more detailed statements, and tells how long elapsed between the

Resurrection Sunday and the Ascension, might have taught hasty critics that an author need not be ignorant of what he does not mention, and that a detailed account does not contradict a summary one, —truths which do not seem very recondite, but have often been forgotten by very learned commentators.

Three points are signalised as occupying the forty days: commandments were given, Christ's actual living presence was demonstrated (by sight, touch, hearing, etc.), and instructions concerning the kingdom were imparted. The old blessed closeness and continuity of companionship had ceased. Our Lord's appearances were now occasional. He came to the disciples, they knew not whence; He withdrew from them, they knew not whither. Apparently a sacred awe restrained them from seeking to detain Him or to follow Him. Their hearts would be full of strangely mingled feelings, and they were being taught by gentle degrees to do without Him. Not only a divine decorum, but a most gracious tenderness, dictated the alternation of presence and absence during these days.

The instructions then given are again referred to in Luke's Gospel, and are there represented as principally directed to opening their minds 'that they might understand the Scriptures.' The main thing about the kingdom which they had then to learn, was that it was founded on the death of Christ, who had fulfilled all the Old Testament predictions. Much remained untaught, which after years were to bring to clear knowledge; but from the illumination shed during these fruitful days flowed the remarkable vigour and confidence of the Apostolic appeal to the prophets, in the first conflicts of the Church with the rulers. Christ is the King of the kingdom, and His Cross is His throne,—these truths being grasped revolutionised the Apostles' conceptions. They are as needful for us.

From verse 4 onwards the last interview seems to be narrated. Probably it began in the city, and ended on the slopes of Olivet. There was a solemn summoning together of the Eleven, which is twice referred to (vs. 4, 6). What awe of expectancy would rest on the group as they gathered round Him, perhaps half suspecting that it was for the last time! His words would change the suspicion into certainty, for He proceeded to tell them what they were not to do and to do, when left alone. The tone of leave-taking is unmistakable.

The prohibition against leaving Jerusalem implies that they would have done so if left to themselves; and it would have been small wonder if they had been eager to hurry back to quiet Galilee, their home, and to shake from their feet the dust of the city where their Lord had been slain. Truly they would feel like sheep in the midst of wolves when He had gone, and Pharisees and priests and Roman officers ringed them round. No wonder if, like a shepherdless flock, they had broken and scattered! But the theocratic importance of Jerusalem, and the fact that nowhere else could the Apostles secure such an audience for their witness, made their 'beginning at Jerusalem' necessary. So they were to crush their natural longing to get back to Galilee, and to stay in their dangerous position. We have all to ask, not where we should be most at ease, but where we shall be most efficient as witnesses for Christ, and to remember that very often the presence of adversaries makes the door 'great and effectual.'

These eleven poor men were not left by their Master with a hard task and no help. He bade them 'wait' for the promised Holy Spirit, the coming of whom they had heard from Him when in the upper room He spoke to them of 'the Comforter.' They were too feeble to act alone, and silence and retirement were all that He enjoined till they had been plunged into the fiery baptism which should quicken, strengthen, and transform them.

The order in which promise and command occur here shows how graciously Jesus considered the Apostles' weakness. Not a word does He say of their task of witnessing, till He has filled their hearts with the promise of the Spirit. He shows them the armour of power in which they are to be clothed, before He points them to the battlefield. Waiting times are not wasted times. Over-eagerness to rush into work, especially into conspicuous and perilous work, is sure to end in defeat. Till we feel the power coming into us, we had better be still.

The promise of this great gift, the nature of which they but dimly knew, set the Apostles' expectations on tiptoe, and they seem to have thought that their reception of it was in some way the herald of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. So it was, but in a very different fashion from their dream. They had not learned so much from the forty days' instructions concerning the kingdom as to be free from their old Jewish notions, which colour their question, 'Wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' They believed that Jesus could establish His kingdom when He would. They were right, and also wrong,—right, for He is King; wrong, for its establishment is not to be effected by a single act of power, but by the slow process of preaching the gospel.

Our Lord does not deal with their misconceptions which could only be cured by time and events; but He lays down great principles, which we need as much as the Eleven did. The 'times and seasons,' the long stretches of days, and the critical epoch-making moments, are known to God only; our business is, not to speculate curiously about these, but to do the plain duty which is incumbent on the Church at all times. The perpetual office of Christ's people to be His witnesses, their equipment for that function (namely, the power of the Holy Spirit coming on them), and the sphere of their work (namely, in ever-widening circles, Jerusalem, Samaria, and the whole world), are laid down, not for the first hearers only, but for all ages and for each individual, in these last words of the Lord as He stood on Olivet, ready to depart.

The calm simplicity of the account of the Ascension is remarkable. So great an event told in such few, unimpassioned words! Luke's Gospel gives the further detail that it was in the act of blessing with uplifted hands that our Lord was parted from the Eleven. Two expressions are here used to describe the Ascension, one of which ('was taken up') implies that He was passive, the other of which ('He went') implies that He was active. Both are true. As in the accounts of the Resurrection He is sometimes said to have been raised, and sometimes to have risen, so here. The Father took the Son back to the glory, the Son left the world and went to the Father. No chariot of fire, no whirlwind, was needed to lift Him to the throne. Elijah was carried by such agency into a sphere new to him; Jesus ascended up where He was before.

No other mode of departure from earth would have corresponded to His voluntary, supernatural birth. He carried manhood up to the throne of God. The cloud which received Him while yet He was well within sight of the gazers was probably that same bright cloud, the symbol of the Divine Presence, which of old dwelt between the cherubim. His entrance into it visibly symbolised the permanent participation, then begun, of His glorified manhood in the divine glory.

Most true to human nature is that continued gaze upwards after He had passed into the hiding brightness of the glory-cloud. How many of us know what it is to look long at the spot on the horizon where the last glint of sunshine struck the sails of the ship that bore dear ones away from us! It was fitting that angels, who had heralded His birth and watched His grave, should proclaim His Second Coming to earth.

It was gracious that, in the moment of keenest sense of desolation and loss, the great hope of reunion should be poured into the hearts of the Apostles. Nothing can be more distinct and assured than the terms of that angel message. It gives for the faith and hope of all ages the assurance that He will come; that He who comes will be the very Jesus who went; that His coming will be, like His departure, visible, corporeal, local. He will bring again all His tenderness, all His brother's heart, all His divine power, and will gather His servants to Himself.

No wonder that, with such hopes flowing over the top of their sorrow, like oil on troubled waters, the little group went back to the upper room, hallowed by memories of the Last Supper, and there waited in prayer and supplication during the ten days which elapsed till Pentecost. So should we use the interval between any promise and its fulfilment. Patient expectation, believing prayer, harmonious association with our brethren, will prepare us for receiving the gift of the Spirit, and will help to equip us as witnesses for Jesus.

THE THEME OF ACTS

'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2. Until the day in which He was taken up.'—ACTS i. 1, 2.

'And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.'—ACTS xxviii. 30, 31.

So begins and so ends this Book. I connect the commencement and the close, because I think that the juxtaposition throws great light upon the purpose of the writer, and suggests some very important lessons. The reference to 'the former treatise (which is, of course, the Gospel according to Luke) implies that this Book is to be regarded as its sequel, and the terms of the reference show the writer's own conception of what he was going to do in his second volume. 'The former treatise have I made . . . of all that Jesus *began* both to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up.' Is not the natural inference that the latter treatise will tell us what Jesus *continued* 'to do and teach' *after* He was taken up? I think so. And thus the writer sets forth at once, for those that have eyes to see, what he means to do, and what he thinks his book is going to be about.

So, then, the name 'The Acts of the Apostles,' which is not coeval with the book itself, is somewhat of a misnomer. Most of the Apostles are never heard of in it. There are, at the most, only three or four of them concerning whom anything in the book is recorded

But our first text supplies a deeper reason for regarding that title as inadequate, and even misleading. For, if the theme of the story be what Christ did, then the book is, not the 'Acts of the *Apostles*,' but the 'Acts of *Jesus Christ*' through His servants. He, and He alone, is the Actor; and the men who appear in it are but instruments in His hands, He alone being the mover of the pawns on the board.

That conception of the purpose of the book seems to me to have light cast upon it by, and to explain, the singular abruptness of its conclusion, which must strike every reader. No doubt it is quite possible that the reason why the book ends in such a singular fashion, planting Paul in Rome, and leaving him there, may be that the date of its composition was that imprisonment of Paul in the Imperial City, in a part of which, at all events, we know that Luke was his companion. But, whilst that consideration may explain the point at which the book stops, it does not explain the way in which it stops. The historian lays down his pen, possibly because he had brought his narrative up to date. But a word of conclusion explaining that it was so would have been very natural, and its absence must have had some reason. It is also possible that the arrival of the Apostle in the Imperial City, and his unhindered liberty of preaching there, in the very centre of power, the focus of intellectual life, and the hot-bed of corruption for the known world, may have seemed to the writer an epoch which rounded off his story. But I think that the reason for the abruptness of the record's close is to be found in the continuity of the work of which it tells a part. It is the unfinished record of an incomplete work. The theme is the work of Christ through the ages, of which each successive depository of His energies can do but a small portion, and must leave that portion unfinished; the book does not so much end as stop. It is a fragment, because the work of which it tells is not yet a whole.

If, then, we put these two things—the beginning and the ending of the Acts—together, I think we get some thoughts about what Christ began to do and teach on earth; what He continues to do and teach in heaven; and how small and fragmentary a share in that work each individual servant of His has. Let us look at these points briefly.

I. First, then, we have here the suggestion of what Christ began to do and teach on earth.

Now, at first sight, the words of our text seem to be in strange and startling contradiction to the solemn cry which rang out of the darkness upon Calvary. Jesus said, 'It is finished!' and 'gave up the ghost.' Luke says He 'began to do and teach.' Is there any contradiction between the two? Certainly not. It is one thing to lay a foundation; it is another thing to build a house. And the work of laying the foundation must be finished before the work of building the structure upon it can be begun. It is one thing to create a force; it is another thing to apply it. It is one thing to compound a medicine; it is another thing to administer it. It is one thing to unveil a truth; it is another to unfold its successive applications, and to work it into a belief and practice in the world. The former is the work of Christ which was finished on earth; the latter is the work which is continuous throughout the ages.

'He began to do and teach,' not in the sense that any should come after Him and do, as the disciples of most great discoverers and thinkers have had to do:

namely, systematise, rectify, and complete the first glimpses of truth which the master had given. 'He began to do and teach,' not in the sense that after He had 'passed into the heavens' any new truth or force can for evermore be imparted to humanity in regard of the subjects which He taught and the energies which He brought. But whilst thus His work is complete, His earthly work is also initial. And we must remember that whatever distinction my text may mean to draw between the work of Christ in the past and that in the present and the future, it does not mean to imply that when He 'ascended up on high' He had not completed the task for which He came, or that the world had to wait for anything more, either from Him or from others, to eke out the imperfections of His doctrine or the insufficiencies of His work.

Let us ever remember that the initial work of Christ on earth is complete in so far as the revelation of God to men is concerned. There will be no other. There is needed no other. Nothing more is possible than what He, by His words and by His life, by His gentleness and His grace, by His patience and His Passion, has unveiled to all men, of the heart and character of God. The revelation is complete, and he that professes to add anything to, or to substitute anything for, the finished teaching of Jesus Christ concerning God, and man's relation to God, and man's duty, destiny, and hopes, is a false teacher, and to follow him is fatal. All that ever come after Him and say, 'Here is something that Christ has not told you,' are thieves and robbers, 'and the sheep will not hear them.'

In like manner that work of Christ, which in some sense is initial, is complete as Redemption. 'This Man has offered up one sacrifice for sins for ever.' And nothing more can He do than He has done; and nothing more can any man or all men do than was accomplished on the Cross of Calvary as giving a revelation, as effecting a redemption, as lodging in the heart of humanity, and in the midst of the stream of human history, a purifying energy, sufficient to cleanse the whole black stream. The past work which culminated on the Cross, and was sealed as adequate and accepted of God in the Resurrection and Ascension, needs no supplement, and can have no continuation, world without end. And so, whatever may be the meaning of that singular phrase, 'began to do and teach,' it does not, in the smallest degree, conflict with the assurance that He hath ascended up on high, 'having obtained eternal redemption for us,' and 'having finished the work which the Father gave Him to do.'

II. But then, secondly, we have to notice what Christ continues to do and to teach after His Ascension.

I have already suggested that the phraseology of the first of my texts naturally leads to the conclusion that the theme of this Book of the Acts is the continuous work of the ascended Saviour, and that the language is not forced by being thus interpreted is very plain to any one who will glance even cursorily over the contents of the book itself. For there is nothing in it more obvious and remarkable than the way in which, at every turn in the narrative, all is referred to Jesus Christ Himself.

For instance, to cull one or two cases in order to bring the matter more plainly before you—When the Apostles determined to select another Apostle to fill Judas' place, they asked Jesus Christ to show which 'of these two Thou hast chosen.' When Peter is called upon to explain the tongues at Pentecost he says, 'Jesus hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.' When the writer would tell the reason of the large first increase to the Church, he says, 'The Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.' Peter and John go into the Temple to heal the lame man, and their words to him are. 'Do not think that our power or holiness is any factor in your cure. The Name hath made this man whole.' It is the Lord that appears to Paul and to Ananias, to the one on the road to Damascus and to the other in the city. It is the Lord to whom Peter refers Æneas when he says, 'Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.' It was the Lord that 'opened the heart of Lydia.' It was the Lord that appeared to Paul in Corinth, and said to him, 'I have much people in this city'; and again, when in the prison at Jerusalem, He assured the Apostle that he would be carried to Rome. And so, at every turn in the narrative, we find that Christ is presented as influencing men's hearts, operating upon outward events, working miracles, confirming His word, leading His servants, and prescribing for them their paths, and all which they do is done by the hand of the Lord with them confirming the word which they spoke. Jesus Christ is the Actor, and He only is the Actor; men are His implements and instruments.

The same point of view is suggested by another of the characteristics of this book, which it shares in common with all Scripture narratives, and that is the stolid indifference with which it picks up and drops men, according to the degree in which, for the moment, they are the instruments of Christ's power. Supposing a man had been writing Acts of the Apostles, do you think it would have been possible that of the greater number of them he should not say a word, that concerning those of whom he does speak he should deal with them as this book does, barely mentioning the martyrdom of James, one of the four chief Apostles; allowing Peter to slip out of the narrative after the great meeting of the Church at Jerusalem; letting Philip disappear without a hint of what he did thereafter; lodging Paul in Rome and leaving him there, with no account of his subsequent work or martyrdom? Such phenomena—and they might be largely multiplied—are only explicable upon one hypothesis. As long as electricity streams on the carbon point it glows and is visible, but when the current is turned to another lamp we see no more of the bit of carbon. As long as God uses a man the man is of interest to the writers of the Scriptures. When God uses another one, they drop the first, and have no more care about him, because their theme is not men and their doings, but God's doings through men.

On us, and in us, and by us, and for us, if we are His servants, Jesus Christ is working all through the ages. He is the Lord of Providence, He is the King of history, in His hand is the book with the seven seals; He sends His Spirit, and where His Spirit is He is; and what His Spirit does He does. And thus He continues to teach and to work from His throne in the heavens.

He continues to teach, not by the communication of new truth. That is finished. The volume of Revelation is complete. The last word of the divine utterances hath been spoken until that final word which shall end Time and crumble the earth. But the application of the completed Revelation, the unfolding of all that is wrapped in germ in it; the growing of the seed into a tree, the realisation more completely by individuals and communities of the principles and truths which Jesus Christ has brought us by His life and His death —that is the work that is going on to-day, and that will go on till the end of the world. For the old Puritan belief is true, though the modern rationalistic mutilations of it are false, 'God hath more light yet to break forth'—and our modern men stop there. But what the sturdy old Puritan said was, 'more light yet to break forth from His holy Word.' Jesus Christ teaches the ages—through the lessons of providence and the communication of His Spirit to His Church—to understand what He gave the world when He was here.

In like manner He works. The foundation is laid, the healing medicine is prepared, the cleansing element is cast into the mass of humanity; what remains is the application and appropriation, and incorporation in conduct, of the redeeming powers that Jesus Christ has brought. And that work is going on, and will go on, till the end.

Now these truths of our Lord's continuous activity in teaching and working from heaven may yield us some not unimportant lessons. What a depth and warmth and reality the thoughts give to the Christian's relation to Jesus Christ! We have to look back to that Cross as the foundation of all our hope. Yes! But we have to think, not only of a Christ who did something for us long ago in the past, and there an end, but of a Christ who to-day lives and reigns, 'to do and to teach' according to our necessities. What a sweetness and sacredness such thoughts impart to all external events, which we may regard as being the operation of His love, and as moved by the hands that were nailed to the Cross for us, and now hold the sceptre of the universe for the blessing of mankind! What a fountain of hope they open in estimating future probabilities of victory for truth and goodness! The forces of good and evil in the world seem very disproportionate, but we forget too often to take Christ into account. It is not *we* that have to fight against evil; at the best we are but the sword which Christ wields, and all the power is in the hand that wields it. Great men die, good men die; Jesus Christ is not dead. Paul was martyred: Jesus lives; He is the anchor of our hope. We see miseries and mysteries enough, God knows. The prospects of all good causes seem often clouded and dark. The world has an awful power of putting drags upon all chariots that bear blessings, and of turning to evil every good. You cannot diffuse education, but you diffuse the taste for rubbish and something worse, in the shape of books. No good thing but has its shadow of evil attendant upon it. And if we had only to estimate by visible or human forces, we might well sit down and wrap ourselves in the sackcloth of pessimism. 'We see not yet all things put under Him'; but 'we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour,' and the vision that cheered the first martyr—of Christ 'standing at the right hand of God'—is the rebuke of every fear and every gloomy anticipation for ourselves or for the world.

What a lesson of lowliness and of diligence it gives us! The jangling church at Corinth fought about whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas was the man to lead the Church, and the experience has been repeated over and over again. 'Who is Paul? Who is Apollos? but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. Be not puffed up one against another. Be not wise in your own conceits.' You are only a tool, only a pawn in the hand of the Great

Player. If you have anything, it is because you get it from Him. See that you use it, and do not boast about it. Jesus Christ is the Worker, the only Worker; the Teacher, the only Teacher. All our wisdom is derived, all our light is enkindled. We are but the reeds through which His breath makes music. And 'shall the axe boast itself,' either 'against' or apart from 'Him that heweth therewith'?

III. Lastly, we note the incompleteness of each man's share in the great work.

As I said, the book which is to tell the story of Christ's continuous unfinished work must stop abruptly. There is no help for it. If it was a history of Paul it would need to be wound up to an end and a selvage put to it, but as it is the history of Christ's working, the web is not half finished, and the shuttle stops in the middle of a cast. The book must be incomplete, because the work of which it is the record does not end until 'He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to the Father, and God shall be all in all.'

So the work of each man is but a fragment of that great work. Every man inherits unfinished tasks from his predecessors, and leaves unfinished tasks to his successors. It is, as it used to be in the Middle Ages, when the hands that dug the foundations, or laid the first courses, of some great cathedral, were dead long generations before the gilded cross was set on the apex of the needlespire, and the glowing glass filled in to the painted windows. Enough for us, if we lay a stone, though it be but one stone in one of the courses of the great building.

Luke has left plenty of blank paper at the end of his second 'treatise,' on which he meant that succeeding generations should write their partial contributions to the completed work. Dear friends, let us see that we write our little line, as monks in their monasteries used to keep the chronicle of the house, on which scribe after scribe toiled at its illuminated letters with loving patience for a little while, and then handed the pen from his dying hand to another. What does it matter though we drop, having done but a fragment? He gathers up the fragments into His completed work, and the imperfect services which He enabled any of us to do will all be represented in the perfect circle of His finished work. The Lord help us to be faithful to the power that works in us, and to leave Him to incorporate our fragments in His mighty whole!

THE FORTY DAYS

'To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.'—ACTS i. 3.

THE forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension have distinctly marked characteristics. They are unlike to the period before them in many respects, but completely similar in others; they have a preparatory character throughout; they all bear on the future work of the disciples, and hearten them for the time when they should be left alone.

The words of the text give us their leading features. They bring out—

1. Their evidential value, as confirming the fact of the Resurrection.

'He showed Himself alive after His passion by . . . proofs.'

By sight, repeated, to individuals, to companies, to Mary in her solitary sadness, to Peter the penitent, to the two on the road to Emmaus. At all hours: in the evening when the doors were shut; in the morning; in grey twilight; in daytime on the road. At many places—in houses, out of doors.

The signs of true corporeity—the sight, the eating.

The signs of bodily identity,—'Reach hither thy hand.' 'He showed them His hands and His side.'

Was this the glorified body?

The affirmative answer is usually rested on the facts that He was not known by Mary or the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and that He came into the upper room when the doors were shut. But the force of these facts is broken by remembering that Mary saw nothing about Him unlike other men, but supposed Him to be the gardener—which puts the idea of a glorified body out of the question, and leaves us to suppose that she was full of weeping indifference to any one.

Then as to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke carefully tells us that the reason why they did not know Him was *in them* and not in Him—that it was 'because their eyes were holden,' not because His body was changed.

And as to His coming when the doors were shut, why should not that be like the other miracles, when 'He conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in the place,' and when He walked on the waters?

There cannot then be anything decidedly built on these facts, and the considerations on the other side are very strong. Surely the whole drift of the narrative goes in the direction of representing Christ's 'glory' as beginning with His Ascension, and consequently the 'body of His glory' as being then assumed. Further, the argument of 1 Cor. xv. goes on the assumption that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that is, that the material corporeity is incongruous with, and incapable of entrance into, the conditions of that future life, and, by parity of reasoning, that the spiritual body, which is to be conformed to the body of Christ's glory, is incongruous with, and incapable of entrance into, the conditions of this earthly life. As is the environment, so must be the 'body' that is at home in it.

Further, the facts of our Lord's eating and drinking after His Resurrection are not easily reconcilable with the contention that He was then invested with the glorified body.

We must, then, think of transfiguration, rather than of resurrection only, as the way by which He passed into the heavens. He 'slept,' but woke, and, as He ascended, was 'changed.'

II. The renewal of the old bond by the tokens of His unchanged disposition.

Recall the many beautiful links with the past: the message to Peter; that to Mary; 'Tell My brethren,' 'He was known in breaking of bread,' 'Peace be with you!' (repetition from John xvii.), the miraculous draught of fishes, and the meal and conversation afterwards, recalling the miracle at the beginning of the closer association of the four Apostles of the first rank with their Lord. The forty days revealed the old heart, the old tenderness. He remembers all the past. He sends a message to the penitent; He renews to the faithful the former gift of 'peace.'

How precious all this is as a revelation of the impotence of death in regard to Him and us! It assures us of the perpetuity of His love. He showed Himself after His passion as the same old Self, the same old tender Lover. His appearances then prepare us for the last vision of

Him in the Apocalypse, in which we see His perpetual humanity, His perpetual tenderness, and hear Him saying: 'I am . . . the Living One, and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.'

These forty days assure us of the narrow limits of the power of death. Love lives through death, memory lives through it. Christ has lived through it and comes up from the grave, serene and tender, with unruffled peace, with all the old tones of tenderness in the voice that said 'Mary!' So may we be sure that through death and after it we shall live and be ourselves. We, too, shall show ourselves alive after we have experienced the superficial change of death.

III. The change in Christ's relations to the disciples and to the world. 'Appearing unto them by the space of forty days.'

The words mark a contrast to Christ's former constant intercourse with the disciples. This is occasional; He appears at intervals during the forty days. He comes amongst them and disappears. He is seen again in the morning light by the lake-side and goes away He tells them to come and meet Him in Galilee. That intermittent presence prepared the disciples for His departure. It was painful and educative. It carried out His own word, 'And now I am no more in the world.'

We observe in the disciples traces of a deeper awe. They say little. 'Master!' 'My Lord and my God!' 'None durst ask Him, Who art Thou?' Even Peter ventures only on 'Lord, Thou knowest all things,' and on one flash of the old familiarity: 'What shall this man do?' John, who recalls very touchingly, in that appendix to his Gospel, the blessed time when he leaned on Jesus' breast at supper, now only humbly follows, while the others sit still and awed, by that strange fire on the banks of the lonely lake.

A clearer vision of the Lord on their parts, a deeper sense of who He is, make them assume more of the attitude of worshippers, though not less that of friends. And He can no more dwell with them, and go in and out among them.

As for the world—'It seeth Me no more, but ye see Me.' He was 'seen of *them*,' not of others. There is no more appeal to the people, no more teaching, no more standing in the Temple. Why is this? Is it not the commentary on His own word on the Cross, 'It is finished!' marking most distinctly that His work on earth was ended when He died, and so confirming that conception of His earthly mission which sees its culmination and centre of power in the Cross?

IV. Instruction and prophecy for the future.

The preparation of the disciples for their future work and condition was a chief purpose of the forty days. Jesus spoke 'of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.' He also 'gave commandments to the Apostles.'

Note how much there is, in His conversations with them—

1. Of opening to them the Scriptures. 'Christ must needs suffer,' etc.

2. Of lessons for their future, thus fitting them for their task.

3. Mark how this transitional period taught them that His going away was not to be sorrow and loss, but joy and gain. 'Touch Me not, for I have not yet ascended.'

Our present relation to the ascended Lord is as much an advance on that of the disciples to the risen Lord, as that was on their relation to Him during His earthly life. They had more real communion with Him when, with opened hearts, they heard Him interpret the Scriptures concerning Himself, and fell at His feet crying 'My Lord and my God!' though they saw Him but for short seasons and at intervals, than when day by day they were with Him and knew Him not. As they grew in love and ripened in knowledge, they knew Him better and better.

For us, too, these forty days are full of blessed lessons, teaching us that real communion with Jesus is attained by faith in Him, and that He is still working in and for us, and is still present with us. The joy with which the disciples saw Him ascend should live on in us as we think of Him enthroned. The hope that the angels' message lit up in their hearts should burn in ours. The benediction which the Risen Lord uttered on those who have not seen and yet have believed falls in double measure on those who, though now they see Him not, yet believing rejoice in Jesus with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

THE UNKNOWN TO-MORROW

A New Year's Sermon

'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.'—ACTS i. 7.

THE New Testament gives little encouragement to a sentimental view of life. Its writers had too much to do, and too much besides to think about, for undue occupation with pensive remembrances or imaginative forecastings. They bid us remember as a stimulus to thanksgiving and a ground of hope. They bid us look forward, but not along the low levels of earth and its changes. One great future is to draw all our longings and to fix our eyes, as the tender hues of the dawn kindle infinite yearnings in the soul of the gazer. What may come is all hidden; we can make vague guesses, but reach nothing more certain. Mist and cloud conceal the path in front of the portion which we are actually traversing, but when it climbs, it comes out clear from the fogs that hang about the flats. We can track it winding up to the throne of Christ. Nothing is certain, but the coming of the Lord and 'our gathering together to Him.'

The words of this text in their original meaning point only to the ignorance of the time of the end which Christ had been foretelling. But they may allow of a much wider application, and their lessons are in entire consonance with the whole tone of Scripture in regard to the future. We are standing now at the beginning of a New Year, and the influence of the season is felt in some degree by us all. Not for the sake of repressing any wise forecasting which has for its object our preparation for probable duties and exigencies; not for the purpose of repressing that trustful anticipation which, building on our past time and on God's eternity, fronts the future with calm confidence; not for the sake of discouraging that pensive and softened mood which if it does nothing more, at least delivers us for a moment from the tyrannous power of the present, do we turn to these words now; but that we may together consider how much they contain of cheer and encouragement, of stimulus to our duty, and of calming for our hearts in the prospect of a New Year. They teach us the limits of our care for the future, as they give us the limits of our knowledge of it. They teach us the best remedies for all anxiety, the great thoughts that tranquillise us in our ignorance, viz. that all is in God's merciful hand, and that whatever may come, we have a divine power which will fit us for it; and they bid us anticipate our work and do it, as the best counterpoise for all vain curiosity about what may be coming on the earth.

I. The narrow limits of our knowledge of the future.

We are quite sure that we shall die. We are sure that a mingled web of joy and sorrow, light shot with dark, will be unrolled before us—but of anything more we are really ignorant. We know that certainly the great majority of us will be alive at the close of this New Year; but who will be the exceptions? A great many of us, especially those of us who are in the monotonous stretch of middle life, will go on substantially as we have been going on for years past, with our ordinary duties, joys, sorrows, cares; but to some of us, in all probability, this year holds some great change which may darken all our days or brighten them. In all our forward-looking there ever remains an element of uncertainty. The future fronts us like some statue beneath its canvas covering. Rolling mists hide it all, except here and there a peak.

I need not remind you how merciful and good it is that it is so. Therefore coming sorrows do not diffuse anticipatory bitterness as of tainted water percolating through gravel, and coming joys are not discounted, and the present has a reality of its own, and is not coloured by what is to come.

Then this being so—what is the wise course of conduct? Not a confident reckoning on to-morrow. There is nothing elevating in anticipation which paints the blank surface of the future with the same earthly colours as dye the present. There is no more complete waste of time than that. Nor is proud self-confidence any wiser, which jauntily takes for granted that 'to-morrow will be as this day.' The conceit that things are to go on as they have been fools men into a dream of permanence which has no basis. Nor is the fearful apprehension of evil any wiser. How many people spoil the present gladness with thoughts of future sorrow, and cannot enjoy the blessedness of united love for thinking of separation!

In brief, it is wise to be but little concerned with the future, except—

1. In the way of taking reasonable precautions to prepare for its probabilities.

2. To fit ourselves for its duties.

One future we may contemplate. Our fault is not that we look forward, but that we do not look far enough forward. Why trouble with the world when we have heaven? Why look along the low level among the mists of earth and forests and swamps, when we can see the road climbing to the heights? Why be anxious about what three hundred and sixty-five days may bring, when we know what Eternity will bring? Why divert our God-given faculty of hope from its true object? Why torment ourselves with casting the fashion of uncertain evils, when we can enter into the great peace of looking for 'that blessed Hope'?

II. The safe Hands which keep the future.

'The Father hath put in His own power.' We have not to depend upon an impersonal Fate; nor upon a wild whirl of Chance; nor upon 'laws of averages,' 'natural laws,' 'tendencies' and 'spirit of the age'; nor even on a theistic Providence, but upon a Father who holds all things 'in His own power,' and wields all for us. So will not our way be made right?

Whatever the future may bring, it will be loving, paternal discipline. He shapes it all and keeps it in His hands. Why should we be anxious? That great name of 'Father' binds Him to tender, wise, disciplinary dealing, and should move us to calm and happy trust.

III. The sufficient strength to face the future.

'The power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you' is promised here to the disciples for a specific purpose; but it is promised and given to us all through Christ, if we will only take it. And in Him we shall be ready for all the future.

The Spirit of God is the true Interpreter of Providence. He calms our nature, and enlightens our understanding to grasp the meaning of all our experiences. The Spirit makes joy more blessed, by keeping us from undue absorption in it. The Spirit is the Comforter. The Spirit fits us for duty.

So be quite sure that nothing will come to you in your earthly future, which He does not Himself accompany to interpret it, and to make it pure blessing.

IV. The practical duty in view of the future.

(*a*) The great thing we ought to look to in the future is our work,—not what we shall enjoy or what we shall endure, but what we shall do. This is healthful and calming.

(*b*) The great remedy for morbid anticipation lies in regarding life as the opportunity for service. Never mind about the future, let it take care of itself. Work! That clears away cobwebs from our brains, as when a man wakes from troubled dreams, to hear 'the sweep of scythe in morning dew,' and the shout of the peasant as he trudges to his task, and the lowing of the cattle, and the clink of the hammer.

(c) The great work we have to do in the future is to be witnesses for Christ. This is the meaning of all life; we can do it in joy and in sorrow, and we shall bear a charmed life till it be done. So the words of the text are a promise of preservation.

Then, dear brethren, how do you stand fronting that Unknown? How can you face it without going mad, unless you know God and trust Him as your Father through Christ? If you do, you need have no fear. To-morrow lies all dim and strange before you, but His gentle and strong hand is working in the darkness and He will shape it right. He will fit you to bear it all. If you regard it as your supreme duty and highest honour to be Christ's witness, you will be kept safe, 'delivered out of the mouth of the lion,' that by you 'the preaching may be fully known.'

If not, how dreary is that future to you, 'all dim and cheerless, like a rainy sea,' from which wild shapes may come up and devour you! Love and friendship will pass, honour and strength will fail, life will ebb away, and of all that once stretched before you, nothing will be left but one little strip of sand, fast jellying with the tide beneath your feet, and before you a wild unlighted ocean!

THE APOSTOLIC WITNESSES

'Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection.'—ACTS i. 21, 22.

THE fact of Christ's Resurrection was the staple of the first Christian sermon recorded in this Book of the Acts of the Apostles. They did not deal so much in doctrine; they did not dwell very distinctly upon what we call, and rightly call, the atoning death of Christ;

out they proclaimed what they had seen with their eyes—that He died and rose again.

And not only was the main subject of their teaching the Resurrection, but it was the Resurrection in one of its aspects and for one specific purpose. There are, speaking roughly, three main connections in which the fact of Christ's rising from the dead is viewed in Scripture, and these three successively emerge in the consciousness of the Early Church.

It was, first, a fact affecting Him, a testimony concerning Him, carrying with it necessarily some great truths with regard to Him, His character, His nature, and His work. And it was in that aspect mainly that the earliest preachers dealt with it. Then, as reflection and the guidance of God's good Spirit led them to understand more and more of the treasure which lay in the fact, it came to be to them, next, a pattern, and a pledge, and a prophecy of their own resurrection. The doctrine of man's immortality and the future life was evolved from it, and was felt to be implied in it. And then it came to be, thirdly and lastly, a symbol or figure of the spiritual resurrection and newness of life into which all they were born who participated in His death. They knew Him first by His Resurrection; they then knew 'the power of His Resurrection' as a pledge of their own; and lastly, they knew it as being the pattern to which they were to be conformed even whilst here on earth.

The words which I have read for my text are the Apostle Peter's own description of what was the office of an Apostle—'to be a witness with us of Christ's Resurrection.' And the statement branches out, I think, into three considerations, to which I ask your attention now. First, we have here the witnesses; secondly, we have the sufficiency of their testimony; and thirdly, we have the importance of the fact to which they bear their witness. The Apostles are testimony-bearers. Their witness is enough to establish the fact. The fact to which they witness is all-important for the religion and the hopes of the world.

I. First, then, the Witnesses.

Here we have the 'head of the Apostolic College,' the 'primate' of the Twelve, on whose supposed primacy—which is certainly not a 'rock'—such tremendous claims have been built, laying down the qualifications and the functions of an Apostle. How simply they present themselves to his mind! The qualification is only personal knowledge of Jesus Christ in His earthly history, because the function is only to attest His Resurrection. Their work was to bear witness to what they had seen with their eyes; and what was needed, therefore, was nothing more than such familiarity with Christ as should make them competent witnesses to the fact that He died, and to the fact that the same Jesus who had died, and whom they knew so well, rose again and went up to heaven.

The same conception of an Apostle's work lies in Christ's last solemn designation of them for their office, where their whole commission is included in the simple words, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me.' It appears again and again in the earlier addresses reported in this book. 'This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.' 'Whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses.' 'With great power gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection.' 'We are His witnesses of these things.' To Cornelius, Peter speaks of the Apostles as 'witnesses chosen before of God, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead'—and whose charge, received from Christ, was 'to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.' Paul at Antioch speaks of the Twelve, from whom he distinguishes himself, as being 'Christ's witnesses to *the people*'—and seems to regard them as specially commissioned to the Jewish nation, while he was sent to 'declare unto you'—Gentiles—the same 'glad tidings,' in that 'God had raised up Jesus again.' So we might go on accumulating passages, but these will suffice.

I need not spend time in elaborating or emphasising the contrast which the idea of the Apostolic office contained in these simple words presents to the portentous theories of later times. I need only remind you that, according to the Gospels, the work of the Apostles in Christ's lifetime embraced three elements, none of which were peculiar to them—to be with Christ, to preach, and to work miracles; that their characteristic work after His Ascension was this of witness-bearing; that the Church did not owe to them as a body its extension, nor Christian doctrine its form; that whilst Peter and James and John appear in the history, and Matthew perhaps wrote a Gospel, and the other James and Jude are probably the authors of the brief Epistles which bear their names—the rest of the Twelve never appear in the subsequent history. The Acts of the Apostles is a misnomer for Luke's second 'treatise.' It tells the work of Peter alone among the Twelve. The Hellenists Stephen and Philip, the Cypriote Barnabas, and the man of Tarsus—greater than them all—these spread the name of Christ beyond the limits of the Holy City and the chosen people. The solemn power of 'binding and loosing' was not a prerogative of the Twelve, for we read that Jesus came where 'the *disciples* were assembled,' and that 'the *disciples* were glad when they saw the Lord'; and 'He breathed on *them*, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose so-ever sins ye remit, they are remitted."'

Where in all this is there a trace of the special Apostolic powers which have been alleged to be transmitted from them? Nowhere. Who was it that came and said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord hath sent me that thou mightest be filled with the Holy Ghost'? A simple 'layman'! Who was it that stood by, a passive and astonished spectator of the communication of spiritual gifts to Gentile converts, and could only say, 'Forasmuch, then, as God gave them the like gift, as He did unto us, what was I that I could withstand God?' Peter, the leader of the Twelve!

Their task was apparently a humbler, really a far more important one. Their place was apparently a lowlier, really a loftier one. They had to lay broad and deep the basis for all the growth and grace of the Church, in the facts which they witnessed. Their work abides; and when the Celestial City is revealed to our longing hearts, in its foundations will be read 'the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.' Their office was testimony; and their testimony was to this effect —'Hearken, we eleven men knew this Jesus. Some of us knew Him when He was a boy, and lived beside that little village where He was brought up. We were with Him for three whole years in close contact day and night. We all of us, though we were cowards, stood afar off with a handful of women when He was crucified. We saw Him dead. We saw His grave. We saw Him living, and we touched Him, and handled Him, and He ate and drank with us; and we, sinners that we are that tell it you, we went out with Him to the top of Olivet, and we saw Him go up into the skies. Do you believe us or do you not? We do not come in the first place to preach doctrines. We are not thinkers or moralists. We are plain men, telling a plain story, to the truth of which we pledge our senses. We do not want compliments about our spiritual elevation, or our pure morality. We do not want reverence as possessors of mysterious and exclusive powers. We want you to believe us as honest men, relating what we have seen. There are eleven of us, and there are five hundred at our back, and we have all got the one simple story to tell. It is, indeed, a gospel, a philosophy, a theology, the reconciliation of earth and heaven, the revelation of God to man, and of man to himself, the unveiling of the future world, the basis of hope; but we bring it to you first as a thing that happened upon this earth of ours, which we saw with our eyes, and of which we are the witnesses.'

To that work there can be no successors. Some of the Apostles were inspired to be the writers of the authoritative fountains of religious truth; but that gift did not belong to them all, and was not the distinctive possession of the Twelve. The power of working miracles, and of communicating supernatural gifts, was not confined to them, but is found exercised by other believers, as well as by a whole 'presbytery.' And as for what was properly their task, and their qualifications, there can be no succession, for there is nothing to succeed to, but what cannot be transmitted—the sight of the risen Saviour, and the witness to His Resurrection as a fact certified by their senses.

II. The sufficiency of the testimony.

Peter regards (as does the whole New Testament, and as did Peter's Master, when He appointed these men) the witness which he and his fellows bore as enough to lay firm and deep the historical fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The first point that I would suggest here is this: if we think of Christianity as being mainly a set of truths —spiritual, moral, intellectual—then, of course, the way to prove Christianity is to show the consistency of that body of truths with one another, their consistency with other truths, their derivation from admitted principles, their reasonableness, their adaptation to men's nature, the refining and elevating effects of their adoption, and so on. If we think of Christianity, on the other hand, as being first a set of historical facts which carry the doctrines, then the way to prove Christianity is not to show how reasonable it is, not to show how it has been anticipated and expected and desired, not to show how it corresponds with men's needs and men's longings, not to show what large and blessed results follow from its acceptance. All these are legitimate ways of establishing principles; but the way to establish a fact is only one—that is, to find somebody that can say, 'I know it, for I saw it.'

And my belief is that the course of modern 'apologetics,' as they are called — methods of defending Christianity—has followed too slavishly the devious course of modern antagonism, and has departed from its real stronghold when it has consented to argue the question on these (as I take them to be) lower and less sufficing grounds. I am thankful to adopt all that wise Christian apologists may have said in regard to the reasonableness of Christianity; its correspondence with men's wants, the blessings that follow from it, and so forth; but the Gospel is first and foremost a history, and you cannot prove that a thing has happened by showing how very desirable it is that it should happen, how reasonable it is to expect that it should happen, what good results would follow from believing that it has happened—all that is irrelevant. Think of it as first a history, and then you are shut up to the old-fashioned line of evidence, irrefragable as I take it to be, to which all these others may afterwards be appended as confirmatory. It is true, because sufficient eye-witnesses assert it. It did happen, because it is commended to us by the ordinary canons of evidence which we accept in regard to all other matters of fact.

With regard to the sufficiency of the specific evidence here, I wish to make only one or two observations.

Suppose you yield up everything that the most craving and unreasonable modern scepticism can demand as to the date and authorship of these tracts that make the New Testament, we have still left four letters of the Apostle Paul, which no one has ever denied, which the very extremest professors of the 'higher criticism' themselves accept. These four are the Epistles to the Romans, the first and second to the Corinthians, and that to the Galatians. The dates which are assigned to these four letters by any one, believer or unbeliever, bring them within five-and-twenty years of the alleged date of Christ's resurrection.

Then what do we find in these undeniably and admittedly genuine letters, written a quarter of a century after the supposed fact? We find in all of them reference to it—the distinct allegation of it. We find in one of them that the Apostle states it as being the substance of his preaching and of his brethren's preaching, that 'Christ died and rose again according to the Scriptures,' and that He was seen by individuals, by multitudes, by a whole five hundred, the greater portion of whom were living and available as witnesses when he wrote.

And we find that side by side with this statement, there is the reference to his own vision of the risen Saviour, which carries us up within ten years of the alleged fact. So, then, by the evidence of admittedly genuine documents, which are dealing with a state of things ten years after the supposed resurrection, there was a unanimous concurrence of belief on the part of the whole primitive Church, so that even the heretics who said that there was no resurrection of the dead could be argued with on the ground of their belief in Christ's Resurrection. The whole Church with one voice asserted it. And there were hundreds of living men ready to attest it. It was not a handful of women who fancied they had seen Him once, very early in the dim twilight of a spring morning—but it was half a thousand that had beheld Him. He had been seen by them not once, but often; not far off, but close at hand; not in one place, but in Galilee and Jerusalem; not under one set of circumstances, but at all hours of the day, abroad and in the house, walking and sitting, speaking and eating, by them singly and in numbers. He had not been seen only by excited expectants of His appearance, but by incredulous eyes and surprised hearts, who doubted ere they worshipped, and paused before they said, 'My Lord and my God!' They neither hoped that He would rise, nor believed that He had risen; and the world may be thankful that they were 'slow of heart to believe.'

Would not the testimony which can be alleged for Christ's Resurrection be enough to guarantee any event but this? And if so, why is it not enough to guarantee this too? If, as nobody denies, the Early Church, within ten years of Christ's Resurrection, believed in His Resurrection, and were ready to go, and did, many of them, go to the death in assertion of their veracity in declaring it, then one of two things—Either they were right or they were wrong; and if the latter, one of two things—If the Resurrection be not a fact, then that belief was either a delusion or a deceit.

It was not a delusion, for such an illusion is altogether unexampled; and it is absurd to think of it as being shared by a multitude like the Early Church. Nations have said, 'Our King is not dead—he is gone away and he will come back.' Loving disciples have said, 'Our Teacher lives in solitude and will return to us.' But this is no parallel to these. This is not a fond imagination giving an apparent substance to its own creation, but sense recognising first the fact, 'He *is* dead,' and then, in opposition to expectation, and when hope had sickened to despair, recognising the astounding fact, 'He liveth that was dead'; and to suppose that that should have been the rooted conviction of hundreds of men who were not idiots, finds no parallel in the history of human illusions, and no analogy in such legends as those to which I have referred.

It was not a myth, for a myth does not grow in ten years. And there was no motive to frame one, if Christ was dead and all was over. It was not a deceit, for the character of the men, and the character of the associated morality, and the obvious absence of all self-interest, and the persecutions and sorrows which they endured, make it inconceivable that the fairest building that ever hath been reared in the world, and which is cemented by men's blood, should be built upon the mud and slime of a conscious deceit!

And all this we are asked to put aside at the bidding of a glaring begging of the whole question, and an outrageous assertion which no man that believes in a God at all can logically maintain, viz. that no testimony can reach to the miraculous, or that miracles are impossible.

No testimony reach to the miraculous! Well, put it into a concrete form. Can testimony not reach to this: 'I know, because I saw, that a man was dead; I know, because I saw, a dead man live again'? If testimony can do that, I think we may safely leave the verbal sophism that it cannot reach to the miraculous to take care of itself.

And, then, with regard to the other assumption—miracle is impossible. That is an illogical begging of the whole question in dispute. It cannot avail to brush aside testimony. You cannot smother facts by theories in that fashion. Again, one would like to know how it comes that our modern men of science, who protest so much against science being corrupted by metaphysics, should commit themselves to an assertion like that? Surely that is stark, staring metaphysics. It seems as if they thought that the 'metaphysics' which said that there was anything behind the physical universe was unscientific; but that the metaphysics which said that there was nothing behind physics was quite legitimate, and ought to be allowed to pass muster. What have the votaries of pure physical science, who hold the barren word-contests of theology and the proud pretensions of philosophy in such contempt, to do out-Heroding Herod in that fashion, and venturing on metaphysical assertions of such a sort? Let them keep to their own line, and tell us all that crucibles and scalpels can reveal, and we will listen as becomes us. But when they contradict their own principles in order to deny the possibility of miracle, we need only give them back their own words, and ask that the investigation of facts shall not be hampered and clogged with metaphysical prejudices. No! no! Christ made no mistake when He built His Church upon that rock—the historical evidence of a resurrection from the dead, though all the wise men of Areopagus hill may make its cliffs ring with mocking laughter when we say, upon Easter morning, 'The Lord is risen indeed!'

III. There is a final consideration connected with these words, which I must deal with very briefly—the importance of the fact which is thus borne witness to.

I have already pointed out that the Resurrection of Christ is viewed in Scripture in three aspects: in its bearing upon His nature and work, as a pattern for our future, and as a symbol of our present newness of life. The importance to which I refer now applies only to that first aspect.

With the Resurrection of Jesus Christ stands or falls the Divinity of Christ. As Paul said, in that letter to which I have referred, 'Declared to be the Son of God, with power by the resurrection from the dead.' As Peter said in the sermon that follows this one of our text, 'God hath made this same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.' As Paul said, on Mars Hill, 'He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.'

The case is this. Jesus lived as we know, and in the course of that life claimed to be the Son of God. He made such broad and strange assertions as these—'I and My Father are One.' 'I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.' 'I am the Resurrection and the Life.'

'He that believeth on Me shall never die.' 'The Son of Man must suffer many things, and the third day He shall rise again.' Thus speaking He dies, and rises again and passes into the heavens. That is the last mightiest utterance of the same testimony, which spake from heaven at His baptism, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!' If He be risen from the dead, then His loftiest claims are confirmed from the throne, and we can see in Him, the Son of God. But if death holds Him still, and 'the Syrian stars look down upon His grave,' as a modern poet tells us in his dainty English that they do, then what becomes of these words of His, and of our estimate of the character of Him, the speaker? Let us hear no more about the pure morality of Jesus Christ, and the beauty of His calm and lofty teaching, and the rest of it. Take away His resurrection from the dead, and we have left beautiful precepts, and fair wisdom, deformed with a monstrous self-assertion and the constant reiteration of claims which the event proves to have been baseless. Either He has risen from the dead or His words were blasphemy. Men nowadays talk very lightly of throwing aside the supernatural portions of the Gospel history, and retaining reverence for the great Teacher, the pure moralist of Nazareth. The Pharisees put the issue more coarsely and truly when they said, 'That deceiver said, while He was yet alive, after three days I will rise again.' Yes! one or the other. 'Declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead,' or—that which our lips refuse to say even as a hypothesis!

Still further, with the Resurrection stands or falls Christ's whole work for our redemption. If He died, like other men—if that awful bony hand has got its grip upon Him too, then we have no proof that the cross was anything but a martyr's cross. His Resurrection is the proof of His completed work of redemption. It is the proof—followed as it is by His Ascension—that His death was not the tribute which for Himself He had to pay, but the ransom for us. His Resurrection is the condition of His present activity. If He has not risen, He has not put away sin; and if He has not put it away by the sacrifice of Himself, none has, and it remains. We come back to the old dreary alternative: 'if Christ be not risen, your faith is vain, and our preaching is vain. Ye are yet in your sins, and they which have fallen asleep in Christ' with unfulfilled hopes fixed upon a baseless vision—they of whom we hoped, through our tears, that they live with Him—they 'are perished.' For, if He be not risen, there is no resurrection; and, if He be not risen, there is no forgiveness; and, if He be not risen, there is no Son of God; and the world is desolate, and the heaven is empty, and the grave is dark, and sin abides, and death is eternal. If Christ be dead, then that awful vision is true, 'As I looked up into the immeasurable heavens for the Divine Eye, it froze me with an empty, bottomless eye-socket.'

There is nothing between us and darkness, despair, death, but that ancient message, 'I declare unto you the Gospel which I preach, by which ye are saved if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was raised the third day according to the Scriptures.'

Well, then, may we take up the ancient glad salutation, 'The Lord is risen!' and, turning from these thoughts of the disaster and despair that that awful supposition drags after it, fall back upon sober certainty, and with the Apostle break forth in triumph, 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept'!

THE ABIDING GIFT AND ITS TRANSITORY ACCOMPANIMENTS

'And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. 5. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? 8. And how we hear every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 9. Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10. Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11. Cretes, and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. 12. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13. Others, mocking, said, These men are full of new wine.'—ACTS ii. 1-13.

ONLY ten days elapsed between the Ascension and Pentecost. The attitude of the Church during that time should be carefully noted. They obeyed implicitly Christ's command to wait for the 'power from on high.' The only act recorded is the election of Matthias to fill Judas's place, and it is at least questionable whether that was not a mistake, and shown to be such by Christ's subsequent choice of Paul as an Apostle. But, with the exception of that one flash of doubtful activity, prayer, supplication, patient waiting, and clinging together in harmonious expectancy, characterised the hundred and twenty brethren.

They must have been wrought to an intense pitch of anticipation, for they knew that their waiting was to be short, and they knew, at least partially, what they were to receive, namely, 'power from on high,' or 'the promise of the Father.' Probably, too, the great Feast, so near at hand, would appear to them a likely time for the fulfilment of the promise.

So, very early on that day of Pentecost, they betook themselves to their usual place of assembling, probably the 'large upper room,' already hallowed to their memories; and in each heart the eager question would spring, 'Will it be to-day?' It is as true now as it was then, that the spirits into whom the Holy Spirit breathes His power must keep themselves still, expectant, prayerful. Perpetual occupation may be more loss of time than devout waiting, with hands folded, because the heart is wide open to receive the power which will fit the hands for better work.

It was but 'the third hour of the day' when Peter stood up to speak; it must have been little after dawn when the brethren came together. How long they had been assembled we do not know, but we cannot doubt how they had been occupied. Many a prayer had gone up through the morning air, and, no doubt, some voice was breathing the united desires, when a deep, strange sound was heard at a distance, and rapidly gained volume, and was heard to draw near. Like the roaring of a tempest hurrying towards them, it hushed human voices, and each man would feel, 'Surely now the Gift comes!' Nearer and nearer it approached, and at last burst into the chamber where they sat silent and unmoving.

But if we look carefully at Luke's words, we see that what filled the house was not agitated air, or wind, but 'a sound as of wind.' The language implies that there was no rush of atmosphere that lifted a hair on any cheek, or blew on any face, but only such a sound as is made by tempest. It suggested wind, but it was not wind. By that first symbolic preparation for the communication of the promised gift, the old symbolism which lies in the very word 'Spirit,' and had been brought anew to the disciples' remembrance by Christ's words to Nicodemus, and by His breathing on them when He gave them an anticipatory and partial bestowment of the Spirit, is brought to view, with its associations of life-giving power and liberty. 'Thou hearest the sound thereof,' could scarcely fail to be remembered by some in that chamber.

But it is not to be supposed that the audible symbol continued when the second preparatory one, addressed to the eye, appeared. As the former had been not wind, but like it, the latter was not fire, but 'as of fire.' The language does not answer the question whether what was seen was a mass from which the tongues detached themselves, or whether only the separate tongues were visible as they moved overhead. But the final result was that 'it sat on each.' The verb has no expressed subject, and 'fire' cannot be the subject, for it is only introduced as a comparison. Probably, therefore, we are to understand 'a tongue' as the unexpressed subject of the verb.

Clearly, the point of the symbol is the same as that presented in the Baptist's promise of a baptism 'with the Holy Ghost and fire.' The Spirit was to be in them as a Spirit of burning, thawing natural coldness and melting hearts with a genial warmth, which should beget flaming enthusiasm, fervent love, burning zeal, and should work transformation into its own fiery substance. The rejoicing power, the quick energy, the consuming force, the assimilating action of fire, are all included in the symbol, and should all be possessed by Christ's disciples.

But were the tongue-like shapes of the flames significant too? It is doubtful, for, natural as is the supposition that they were, it is to be remembered that 'tongues of fire' is a usual expression, and may mean nothing more than the flickering shoots of flame into which a fire necessarily parts.

But these two symbols are only symbols. The true fulfilment of the great promise follows. Mark the brief simplicity of the quiet words in which the greatest bestowment ever made on humanity, the beginning of an altogether new era, the equipment of the Church for her age-long conflict, is told. There was an actual impartation to men of a divine life, to dwell in them and actuate them; to bring all good to victory in them; to illuminate, sustain, direct, and elevate; to cleanse and quicken. The gift was complete. They were 'filled.' No doubt they had much more to receive, and they received it, as their natures became, by faithful obedience to the indwelling Spirit, capable of more. But up to the measure of their then capacities they were filled; and, since their spirits were expansible, and the gift was infinite, they were in a position to grow steadily in possession of it, till they were 'filled with all the fulness of God.'

Further, 'they were *all* filled,'—not the Apostles only, but the whole hundred and twenty. Peter's quotation from Joel distinctly implies the universality of the gift, which the 'servants and handmaidens,' the brethren and the women, now received. Herein is the true democracy of Christianity. There are still diversities of operations and degrees of possession, but all Christians have the Spirit. All 'they that believe on Him.'

and only they, have received it. Of old the light shone only on the highest peaks,—prophets, and kings, and psalmists; now the lowest depths of the valleys are flooded with it. Would that Christians generally believed more fully in, and set more store by, that great gift!

As symbols preceded, tokens followed. The essential fact of Pentecost is neither the sound and fire, nor the speaking with other tongues, but the communication of the Holy Spirit. The sign and result of that was the gift of utterance in various languages, not their own, nor learned by ordinary ways. No twisting of the narrative can weaken the plain meaning of it, that these unlearned Galileans spake in tongues which their users recognised to be their own. The significance of the fact will appear presently, but first note the attestation of it by the multitude.

Of course, the foreign-born Jews, who, from motives of piety, however mistaken, had come to dwell in Jerusalem, are said to have been 'from every nation under heaven,' by an obvious and ordinary license. It is enough that, as the subsequent catalogue shows, they came from all corners of the then known world, though the extremes of territory mentioned cover but a small space on a terrestrial globe.

The 'sound' of the rushing wind had been heard hurtling through the city in the early morning hours, and had served as guide to the spot. A curious crowd came hurrying to ascertain what this noise of tempest in a calm meant, and they were met by something more extraordinary still. Try to imagine the spectacle. As would appear from verse 33, the tongues of fire remained lambently glowing on each head ('which ye see'), and the whole hundred and twenty, thus strangely crowned, were pouring out rapturous praises, each in some strange tongue. When the astonished ears had become accustomed to the apparent tumult, every man in the crowd heard some one or more speaking in his own tongue, language, or dialect, and all were declaring the mighty works of God; that is, probably, the story of the crucified, ascended Jesus.

We need not dwell on subordinate questions, as to the number of languages represented there, or as to the catalogue in verses 9 and 10. But we would emphasise two thoughts. First, the natural result of being filled with God's Spirit is utterance of the great truths of Christ's Gospel. As surely as light radiates, as surely as any deep emotion demands expression, so certainly will a soul filled with the Spirit be forced to break into speech. If professing Christians have never known the impulse to tell of the Christ whom they have found, their religion must be very shallow and imperfect. If their spirits are full, they will overflow in speech.

Second, Pentecost is a prophecy of the universal proclamation of the Gospel, and of the universal praise which shall one day rise to Him that was slain. 'This company of brethren praising God in the tongues of the whole world represented the whole world which shall one day praise God in its various tongues' (Bengel). Pentecost reversed Babel, not by bringing about a featureless monopoly, but by consecrating diversity, and showing that each language could be hallowed, and that each lent some new strain of music to the chorus.

It prophesied of the time when 'men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation' should lift up their voices to Him who has purchased them unto God with

His blood. It began a communication of the Spirit to all believers which is never to cease while the world stands. The mighty rushing sound has died into silence, the fiery tongues rest on no heads now, the miraculous results of the gifts of the Spirit have passed away also, but the gift remains, and the Spirit of God abides for ever with the Church of Christ.

THE FOURFOLD SYMBOLS OF THE SPIRIT

'A rushing mighty wind.' . . . 'Cloven tongues like as of fire.' . . . 'I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh.'—ACTS ii. 2, 3, 17.

'Ye have an unction from the Holy One.'—1 JOHN ii. 20.

WIND, fire, water, oil,—these four are constant Scriptural symbols for the Spirit of God. We have them all in these fragments of verses which I have taken for my text now, and which I have isolated from their context for the purpose of bringing out simply these symbolical references. I think that perhaps we may get some force and freshness to the thoughts proper to this day[1] by looking at these rather than by treating the subject in some more abstract form. We have then the Breath of the Spirit, the Fire of the Spirit, the Water of the Spirit, and the Anointing Oil of the Spirit. And the consideration of these four will bring out a great many of the principal Scriptural ideas about the gift of the Spirit of God which belongs to all Christian souls.

I. First, 'a rushing mighty wind.'

Of course, the symbol is but the putting into picturesque form of the idea that lies in the name. 'Spirit' is 'breath.' Wind is but air in motion. Breath is the synonym for life. 'Spirit' and 'life' are two words for one thing. So then, in the symbol, the 'rushing mighty wind,' we have set forth the highest work of the Spirit —the communication of a new and supernatural life.

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[1] Whit Sunday.

We are carried back to that grand vision of the prophet who saw the bones lying, very many and very dry, sapless and disintegrated, a heap dead and ready to rot. The question comes to him: 'Son of man! Can these bones live?' The only possible answer, if he consult experience, is, 'O Lord God! Thou knowest.' Then follows the great invocation: 'Come from the four winds, O Breath! and breathe upon these slain that they may live.' And the Breath comes and 'they stand up, an exceeding great army.' 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth.' The Scripture treats us all as dead, being separated from God, unless we are united to Him by faith in Jesus Christ. According to the saying of the Evangelist, 'They which believe on Him receive' the Spirit, and thereby receive the life which He gives, or, as our Lord Himself speaks, are 'born of the Spirit.' The highest and most characteristic office of the Spirit of God is to enkindle this new life, and hence His noblest name, among the many by which He is called, is the Spirit of life.

Again, remember, 'that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.' If there be life given it must be kindred with the life which is its source. Reflect upon those profound words of our Lord: 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.' They describe first the operation of the life-giving Spirit, but they describe also the characteristics of the resulting life.

'The wind bloweth where it listeth.' That spiritual life, both in the divine source and in the human recipient, is its own law. Of course the wind has its laws, as every physical agent has; but these are so complicated and undiscovered that it has always been the very symbol of freedom, and poets have spoken of these 'chartered libertines,' the winds, and 'free as the air' has become a proverb. So that Divine Spirit is limited by no human conditions or laws, but dispenses His gifts in superb disregard of conventionalities and externalisms. Just as the lower gift of what we call 'genius' is above all limits of culture or education or position, and falls on a wool-stapler in Stratford-on-Avon, or on a ploughman in Ayrshire, so, in a similar manner, the altogether different gift of the divine, life-giving Spirit follows no lines that Churches or institutions draw. It falls upon an Augustinian monk in a convent, and he shakes Europe. It falls upon a tinker in Bedford gaol, and he writes *Pilgrim's Progress.* It falls upon a cobbler in Kettering, and he founds modern Christian missions. It blows 'where it listeth,' sovereignly indifferent to the expectations and limitations and the externalisms, even of organised Christianity, and touching this man and that man, not arbitrarily but according to 'the good pleasure' that is a law to itself, because it is perfect in wisdom and in goodness.

And as thus the life-giving Spirit imparts Himself according to higher laws than we can grasp, so in like manner the life that is derived from it is a life which is its own law. The Christian conscience, touched by the Spirit of God, owes allegiance to no regulations or external commandments laid down by man. The Christian conscience, enlightened by the Spirit of God, at its peril will take its beliefs from any other than from that Divine Spirit. All authority over conduct, all authority over belief is burnt up and disappears in the presence of the grand democracy of the true Christian principle: 'Ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ'; and every one of you possesses the Spirit which teaches, the Spirit which inspires, the Spirit which enlightens, the Spirit which is the guide to all truth. So 'the wind bloweth where it listeth,' and the voice of that Divine Quickener is,

> 'Myself shall to My darling be
> Both law and impulse.'

Under the impulse derived from the Divine Spirit, the human spirit 'listeth' what is right, and is bound to follow the promptings of its highest desires. Those men only are free as the air we breathe, who are vitalised by the Spirit of the Lord, for 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there,' and there alone, 'is liberty.'

In this symbol there lies not only the thought of a life derived, kindred with the life bestowed, and free like the life which is given, but there lies also the idea of power. The wind which filled the house was not only mighty but 'borne onward'—fitting type of the strong impulse by which in olden times 'holy men spake as they were "borne onward"' (the word is the same) 'by the Holy Ghost.' There are diversities of operations, but it is the same breath of God, which sometimes blows in the softest *pianissimo* that scarcely rustles the summer woods in the leafy month of June, and sometimes storms in wild tempest that dashes the seas against the rocks. So this mighty life-giving Agent moves in gentleness and yet in power, and sometimes swells and rises almost to tempest, but is ever the impelling force of all that is strong and true and fair in Christian hearts and lives.

The history of the world, since that day of Pentecost, has been a commentary upon the words of my text. With viewless, impalpable energy, the mighty breath of God swept across the ancient world and 'laid the lofty city' of paganism 'low; even to the ground, and brought it even to the dust.' A breath passed over the whole civilised world, like the breath of the west wind upon the glaciers in the spring, melting the thick-ribbed ice, and wooing forth the flowers, and the world was made over again. In our own hearts and lives this is the one Power that will make us strong and good. The question is all-important for each of us, 'Have I this life, and does it move me, as the ships are borne along by the wind?' 'As many as are impelled by the Spirit of God, they'—*they*—'are the sons of God.' Is that the breath that swells all the sails of your lives, and drives you upon your course? If it be, you are Christians; if it be not, you are not.

II. And now a word as to the second of these symbols—'Cloven tongues as of fire'—the fire of the Spirit.

I need not do more than remind you how frequently that emblem is employed both in the Old and in the New Testament. John the Baptist contrasted the cold negative efficiency of his baptism, which at its best, was but a baptism of repentance, with the quickening power of the baptism of Him who was to follow him; when he said, 'I indeed baptise you with water, but He that cometh after me is mightier than I. He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' The two words mean but one thing, the fire being the emblem of the Spirit.

You will remember, too, how our Lord Himself employs the same metaphor when He speaks about His coming to bring fire on the earth, and His longing to see it kindled into a beneficent blaze. In this connection the fire is a symbol of a quick, triumphant energy, which will transform us into its own likeness. There are two sides to that emblem: one destructive, one creative; one wrathful, one loving. There are the fire of love, and the fire of anger. There is the fire of the sunshine which is the condition of life, as well as the fire of the lightning which burns and consumes. The emblem of fire is selected to express the work of the Spirit of God, by reason of its leaping, triumphant, transforming energy. See, for instance, how, when you kindle a pile of dead green-wood, the tongues of fire spring from point to point until they have conquered the whole mass, and turned it all into a ruddy likeness of the parent flame. And so here, this fire of God, if it fall upon you, will burn up all your coldness, and will make you glow with enthusiasm, working your intellectual convictions in fire not in frost, making your creed a living power in your lives, and kindling you into a flame of earnest consecration.

The same idea is expressed by the common phrases of every language. We speak of the fervour of love, the warmth of affection, the blaze of enthusiasm, the fire of emotion, the coldness of indifference. Christians are to be set on fire of God. If the Spirit dwell in us, He will make us fiery like Himself, even as fire turns the wettest green-wood into fire. We have more than enough of cold Christians who are afraid of nothing so much as of being betrayed into warm emotion.

I believe, dear brethren, and I am bound to express the belief, that one of the chief wants of the Christian Church of this generation, the Christian Church of this city, the Christian Church of this chapel, is more of the fire of God! We are all icebergs compared with what we ought to be. Look at yourselves; never mind about your brethren. Let each of us look at his own heart, and say whether there is any trace in his Christianity of the power of that Spirit who is fire. Is our religion flame or ice? Where among us are to be found lives blazing with enthusiastic devotion and earnest love? Do not such words sound like mockery when applied to us? Have we not to listen to that solemn old warning that never loses its power, and, alas! seems never to lose its appropriateness: 'Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth.' We ought to be like the burning beings before God's throne, the seraphim, the spirits that blaze and serve. We ought to be like God Himself, all aflame with love. Let us seek penitently for that Spirit of fire who will dwell in us all if we will.

The metaphor of fire suggests also—purifying. 'The Spirit of burning' will burn the filth out of us. That is the only way by which a man can ever be made clean. You may wash and wash and wash with the cold water of moral reformation, you will never get the dirt out with it. No washing and no rubbing will ever cleanse sin. The way to purge a soul is to do with it as they do with foul clay—thrust it into the fire and that will burn all the blackness out of it. Get the love of God into your hearts, and the fire of His Divine Spirit into your spirits to melt you down, as it were, and then the scum and the dross will come to the top, and you can skim them off. Two powers conquer my sin: the one is the blood of Jesus Christ, which washes me from all the guilt of the past; the other is the fiery influence of that Divine Spirit which makes me pure and clean for all the time to come. Pray to be kindled with the fire of God.

III. Then once more, take that other metaphor, 'I will pour out of My Spirit.'

That implies an emblem which is very frequently used, both in the Old and in the New Testament, viz., the Spirit as water. As our Lord said to Nicodemus: 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.' The 'water' stands in the same relation to the 'Spirit' as the 'fire' does in the saying of John the Baptist already referred to—that is to say, it is simply a symbol or material emblem of the Spirit. I suppose nobody would say that there were two baptisms spoken of by John, one of the Holy Ghost and one of fire,—and I suppose that just in the same way, there are not two agents of regeneration pointed at in our Lord's words, nor even two conditions, but that the Spirit is the sole agent, and 'water' is but a figure to express some aspect of His operations. So that there is no reference to the water of baptism in the words, and to see such a reference is to be led astray by sound, and out of a metaphor to manufacture a miracle.

There are other passages where, in like manner, the Spirit is compared to a flowing stream, such as, for instance, when our Lord said, 'He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,' and when John saw a 'river of water of life proceeding from the throne.' The expressions, too, of 'pouring out' and 'shedding forth' the Spirit, point in the same direction, and are drawn from more than one passage of Old Testament prophecy. What, then, is the significance of comparing that Divine Spirit with a river of water? First, cleansing, of which I need not say any more, because I have dealt with it in the previous part of my sermon. Then, further, refreshing, and satisfying. Ah! dear brethren, there is only one thing that will slake the immortal thirst in your souls. The world will never do it; love or ambition gratified and wealth possessed, will never do it. You will be as thirsty after you have drunk of these streams as ever you were before. There is one spring 'of which if a man drink, he shall never thirst' with unsatisfied, painful longings, but shall never cease to thirst with the longing which is blessedness, because it is fruition. Our thirst can be slaked by the deep draught of 'the river of the Water of Life, which proceeds from the Throne of God and the Lamb.' The Spirit of God, drunk in by my spirit, will still and satisfy my whole nature, and with it I shall be glad. Drink of this. 'Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!'

The Spirit is not only refreshing and satisfying, but also productive and fertilising. In Eastern lands a rill of water is all that is needed to make the wilderness rejoice. Turn that stream on to the barrenness of your hearts, and fair flowers will grow that would never grow without it. The one means of lofty and fruitful Christian living is a deep, inward possession of the Spirit of God. The one way to fertilise barren souls is to let that stream flood them all over, and then the flush of green will soon come, and that which is else a desert will 'rejoice and blossom as the rose.'

So this water will cleanse, it will satisfy and refresh, it will be productive and will fertilise, and 'everything shall live whithersoever that river cometh.'

IV. Then, lastly, we have the oil of the Spirit.

'Ye have an unction,' says St. John in our last text, 'from the Holy One.' I need not remind you, I suppose, of how in the old system, prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with consecrating oil, as a symbol of their calling, and of their fitness for their special offices. The reason for the use of such a symbol, I presume, would lie in the invigorating and in the supposed, and possibly real, health-giving effect of the use of oil in those climates. Whatever may have been the reason for the use of oil in official anointings, the meaning of the act was plain. It was a preparation for a specific and distinct service. And so, when we read of the oil of the Spirit, we are to think that it is that which fits us for being prophets, priests, and kings, and which calls us to, because it fits us for, these functions.

You are anointed to be prophets that you may make known Him who has loved and saved you, and may go about the world evidently inspired to show forth His praise, and make His name glorious. That anointing calls and fits you to be priests, mediators between God and man, bringing God to men, and by pleading and persuasion, and the presentation of the truth, drawing men to God. That unction calls and fits you to be kings, exercising authority over the little monarchy of your own natures, and over the men round you, who will bow in submission whenever they come in contact with a man all evidently aflame with the love of Jesus Christ, and filled with His Spirit. The world is hard and rude; the world is blind and stupid; the world often fails to know its best friends and its truest benefactors; but there is no crust of stupidity so crass and dense but that through it there will pass the penetrating shafts of light that ray from the face of a man who walks in fellowship with Jesus. The whole nation of old was honoured with these sacred names. They were a kingdom of priests; and the divine Voice said of the nation, 'Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm!' How much more are all Christian men, by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, made prophets, priests, and kings to God! Alas for the difference between what they ought to be and what they are!

And then, do not forget also that when the Scriptures speak of Christian men as being anointed, it really speaks of them as being Messiahs. 'Christ' means *anointed*, does it not? 'Messiah' means *anointed*. And when we read in such a passage as that of my text, 'Ye have an unction from the Holy One,' we cannot but feel that the words point in the same direction as the great words of our Master Himself, 'As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.' By authority derived, no doubt, and in a subordinate and secondary sense, of course, we are Messiahs, anointed with that Spirit which was given to Him, not by measure, and which has passed from Him to us. 'If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.'

So, dear brethren, all these things being certainly so, what are we to say about the present state of Christendom? What are we to say about the present state of English Christianity, Church and Dissent alike? Is Pentecost a vanished glory, then? Has that 'rushing mighty wind' blown itself out, and a dead calm followed? Has that leaping fire died down into grey ashes? Has the great river that burst out then, like the stream from the foot of the glaciers of Mont Blanc, full-grown in its birth, been all swallowed up in the sand, like some of those rivers in the East? Has the oil dried in the cruse? People tell us that Christianity is on its death-bed; and the aspect of a great many professing Christians seems to confirm the statement. But let us thankfully recognise that 'we are not straitened in God, but in ourselves.' To how many of us the question might be put: 'Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?' And how many of us by our lives answer: 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.' Let us go where we can receive Him; and remember the blessed words: 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him'!

PETER'S FIRST SERMON

'This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. 33. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. 34. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, 35. Until I make Thy foes Thy footstool. 36. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. 37. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. 40. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. 42. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.'—ACTS ii. 32-47.

THIS passage may best be dealt with as divided into three parts: the sharp spear-thrust of Peter's closing words (vs. 32-36), the wounded and healed hearers (vs. 37-41), and the fair morning dawn of the Church (vs. 42-47).

I. Peter's address begins with pointing out the fulfilment of prophecy in the gift of the Spirit (vs. 14-21). It then declares the Resurrection of Jesus as foretold by prophecy, and witnessed to by the whole body of believers (vs. 22-32), and it ends by bringing together these two facts, the gift of the Spirit and the Resurrection and Ascension, as effect and cause, and as establishing beyond all doubt that Jesus is the Christ of prophecy, and the Lord on whom Joel had declared that whoever called should be saved. We now begin with the last verse of the second part of the address.

Observe the significant alternation of the names of 'Christ' and 'Jesus' in verses 31 and 32. The former verse establishes that prophecy had foretold the Resurrection of the Messiah, whoever he might be; the latter asserts that 'this Jesus' has fulfilled the prophetic conditions. That is not a thing to be argued about, but to be attested by competent witnesses. It was presented to the multitude on Pentecost, as it is to us, as a plain matter of fact, on which the whole fabric of Christianity is built, and which itself securely rests on the concordant testimony of those who knew Him alive, saw Him dead, and were familiar with Him risen.

There is a noble ring of certitude in Peter's affirmation, and of confidence that the testimony producible was overwhelming. Unless Jesus had risen, there would neither have been a Pentecost nor a Church to receive the gift. The simple fact which Peter alleged in that first sermon, 'whereof we all are witnesses,' is still too strong for the deniers of the Resurrection, as their many devices to get over it prove.

But, a listener might ask, what has this witness of yours to do with Joel's prophecy, or with this speaking with tongues? The answer follows in the last part of the sermon. The risen Jesus has ascended up; that is inseparable from the fact of resurrection, and is part of our testimony. He is 'exalted by,' or, perhaps, at, 'the right hand of God.' And that exaltation is to us the token that there He has received from the Father the Spirit, whom He promised to send when He left us. Therefore it is He—'this Jesus'—who has 'poured forth this,'—this new strange gift, the tokens of which you see flaming on each head, and hear bursting in praise from every tongue.

What triumphant emphasis is in that 'He'! Peter quotes Joel's word 'pour forth.' The prophet had said, as the mouthpiece of God, '*I* will pour forth'; Peter unhesitatingly transfers the word to Jesus. We must not assume in him at this stage a fully-developed consciousness of our Lord's divine nature, but neither must we blink the tremendous assumption which he feels warranted in making, that the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God meant His exercising the power which belonged to God Himself.

In verse 34, he stays for a moment to establish by prophecy that the Ascension, of which he had for the first time spoken in verse 33, is part of the prophetic characteristics of the Messiah. His demonstration runs parallel with his preceding one as to the Resurrection. He quotes Psalm cx., which he had learned to do from his Master, and just as he had argued about the prediction of Resurrection, that the dead Psalmist's words could not apply to himself, and must therefore apply to the Messiah; so he concludes that it was not 'David' who was called by Jehovah to sit as 'Lord' on His right hand.

If not David, it could only be the Messiah who was thus invested with Lordship, and exalted as participator of the throne of the Most High.

Then comes the final thrust of the spear, for which all the discourse has been preparing. The Apostle rises to the full height of his great commission, and sets the trumpet to his mouth, summoning 'all the house of Israel,' priests, rulers, and all the people, to acknowledge his Master. He proclaims his supreme dignity and Messiahship. He is the 'Lord' of whom the Psalmist sang, and the prophet declared that whoever called on His name should be saved; and He is the Christ for whom Israel looked.

Last of all, he sets in sharp contrast what God had done with Jesus, and what Israel had done, and the barb of his arrow lies in the last words, 'whom ye crucified.' And this bold champion of Jesus, this undaunted arraigner of a nation's crimes, was the man who, a few weeks before, had quailed before a maid-servant's saucy tongue! What made the change? Will anything but the Resurrection and Pentecost account for the psychological transformation effected in him and the other Apostles?

II. No wonder that 'they were pricked in their heart'! Such a thrust must have gone deep, even where the armour of prejudice was thick. The scene they had witnessed, and the fiery words of explanation, taken together, produced incipient conviction, and the conviction produced alarm. How surely does the first glimpse of Jesus as Christ and Lord set conscience to work! The question, 'What shall we do?' is the beginning of conversion. The acknowledgment of Jesus which does not lead to it is shallow and worthless. The most orthodox accepter, so far as intellect goes, of the gospel, who has not been driven by it to ask his own duty in regard to it, and what he is to do to receive its benefits, and to escape from his sins, has not accepted it at all.

Peter's answer lays down two conditions: repentance and baptism. The former is often taken in too narrow a sense as meaning sorrow for sin, whereas it means a change of disposition or mind, which will be accompanied, no doubt, with 'godly sorrow,' but is in itself deeper than sorrow, and is the turning away of heart and will from past love and practice of evil. The second, baptism, is 'in the name of Jesus Christ,' or more accurately, '*upon* the name,'—that is, on the ground of the revealed character of Jesus. That necessarily implies faith in that Name; for, without such faith, the baptism would not be on the ground of the Name. The two things are regarded as inseparable, being the inside and the outside of the Christian discipleship. Repentance, faith, baptism, these three, are called for by Peter.

But 'remission of sins' is not attached to the immediately preceding clause, so as that baptism is said to secure remission, but to the whole of what goes before in the sentence. Obedience to the requirements would bring the same gift to the obedient as the disciples had received; for it would make them disciples also. But, while repentance and baptism which presupposed faith were the normal, precedent conditions of the Spirit's bestowal, the case of Cornelius, where the Spirit was given before baptism, forbids the attempt to link the rite and the divine gift more closely together.

The Apostle was eager to share the gift. The more we have of the Spirit, the more shall we desire that others may have Him, and the more sure shall we be that He is meant for all. So Peter went on to base his assurance, that his hearers might all possess the Spirit, on the universal destination of the promise. Joel had said, 'on all flesh'; Peter declares that word to point downwards through all generations, and outwards to all nations. How swiftly had he grown in grasp of the sweep of Christ's work! How far beneath that moment of illumination some of his subsequent actions fell!

We have only a summary of his exhortations, the gist of which was earnest warning to separate from the fate of the nation by separating in will and mind from its sins. Swift conviction followed the Spirit-given words, as it ever will do when the speaker is filled with the Holy Spirit, and has therefore a tongue of fire. Three thousand new disciples were made that day, and though there must have been many superficial adherents, and none with much knowledge, it is perhaps not fanciful to see in Luke's speaking of them as 'souls' a hint that, in general, the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah was deep and real. Not only were three thousand 'names' added to the hundred and twenty, but three thousand souls.

III. The fair picture of the morning brightness, so soon overclouded, so long lost, follows. First, the narrative tells how the raw converts were incorporated in the community, and assimilated to its character. They, too, 'continued steadfastly' (Acts i. 14). Note the four points enumerated: 'teaching,' which would be principally instruction in the life of Jesus and His Messianic dignity, as proved by prophecy; 'fellowship,' which implies community of disposition and oneness of heart manifested in outward association; 'breaking of bread,'—that is, the observance of the Lord's Supper; and 'the prayers,' which were the very life-breath of the infant Church (i. 14).

Thus oneness in faith and in love, participation in the memorial feast and in devotional acts bound the new converts to the original believers, and trained them towards maturity. These are still the methods by which a sudden influx of converts is best dealt with, and babes in Christ nurtured to full growth. Alas! that so often churches do not know what to do with novices when they come in numbers.

A wider view of the state of the community as a whole closes the chapter. It is the first of several landing-places, as it were, on which Luke pauses to sum up an epoch. A reverent awe laid hold of the popular mind, which was increased by the miraculous powers of the Apostles. The Church will produce that impression on the world in proportion as it is manifestly filled with the Spirit. Do we? The so-called community of goods was not imposed by commandment, as is plain from Peter's recognition of Ananias' right to do as he chose with his property. The facts that Mark's mother, Mary, had a house of her own, and that Barnabas, her relative, is specially signalised as having sold his property, prove that it was not universal. It was an irrepressible outcrop of the brotherly feeling that filled all hearts. Christ has not come to lay down laws, but to give impulses. Compelled communism is not the repetition of that oneness of sympathy which effloresced in the bright flower of this common possession of individual goods. But neither is the closed purse, closed because the heart is shut, which puts to shame so much profession of brotherhood, justified because the liberality of the primitive disciples was not by constraint nor of obligation, but willing and spontaneous.

Verses 46 and 47 add an outline of the beautiful daily life of the community, which was, like their liberality the outcome of the feeling of brotherhood, intensified by the sense of the gulf between them and the crooked generation from which they had separated themselves. Luke shows it on two sides. Though they had separated from the nation, they clung to the Temple services, as they continued to do till the end. They had not come to clear consciousness of all that was involved in their discipleship. It was not God's will that the new spirit should violently break with the old letter. Convulsions are not His way, except as second-best. The disciples had to stay within the fold of Israel, if they were to influence Israel. The time of outward parting between the Temple and the Church was far ahead yet.

But the truest life of the infant Church was not nourished in the Temple, but in the privacy of their homes. They were one family, and lived as such. Their 'breaking bread at home' includes both their ordinary meals and the Lord's Supper; for in these first days every meal, at least the evening meal of every day, was hallowed by having the Supper as a part of it. Each meal was thus a religious act, a token of brotherhood, and accompanied with praise. Surely *then* 'men did eat angels' food,' and on platter and cup was written 'Holiness to the Lord.' The ideal of human fellowship was realised, though but for a moment, and on a small scale. It was inevitable that divergences should arise, but it was not inevitable that the Church should depart so far from the brief brightness of its dawn. Still the sweet concordant brotherhood of these morning hours witnesses what Christian love can do, and prophesies what shall yet be and shall not pass.

No wonder that such a Church won favour with all the people! We hear nothing of its evangelising activity, but its life was such that, without recorded speech, multitudes were drawn into so sweet a fellowship. If we were like the Pentecostal Christians, we should attract wearied souls out of the world's Babel into the calm home where love and brotherhood reigned, and God would 'add' to *us* 'day by day those that were being saved.'

THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME

'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.'—ACTS ii. 36.

IT is no part of my purpose at this time to consider the special circumstances under which these words were spoken, nor even to enter upon an exposition of their whole scope. I select them for one reason, the occurrence in them of the three names by which we designate our Saviour—Jesus, Lord, Christ. To us they are very little more than three proper names; they were very different to these men who listened to the characteristically vehement discourse of the Apostle Peter. It wanted some courage to stand up at Pentecost and proclaim on the housetop what he had spoken in the ear long ago, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!' To most of his listeners to say 'Jesus is the Christ' was folly, and to say 'Jesus is the Lord' was blasphemy.

The three names are names of the same Person, but they proclaim altogether different aspects of His work and His character. The name 'Jesus' is the name of the Man, and brings to us a Brother; the name 'Christ' is the name of office, and brings to us a Redeemer; the name 'Lord' is the name of dignity, and brings to us a King.

I. First, then, the name Jesus is the name of the Man, and tells us of a Brother.

There were many men in Palestine who bore the name of 'Jesus' when He bore it. We find that one of the early Christians had it; and it comes upon us with almost a shock when we read that 'Jesus, called Justus,' was the name of one of the friends of the Apostle Paul (Col. iv. 11). But, through reverence on the part of Christians, and through horror on the part of Jews, the name ceased to be a common one; and its disappearance from familiar use has hid from us the fact of its common employment at the time when our Lord bore it. Though it was given to Him as indicative of His office of saving His people from their sins, yet none of all the crowds who knew Him as Jesus of Nazareth supposed that in His name there was any greater significance than in those of the 'Simons,' 'Johns,' and 'Judahs' in the circle of His disciples.

Now the use of Jesus as the proper name of our Lord is very noticeable. In the Gospels, as a rule, it stands alone hundreds of times, whilst in combination with any other of the titles it is rare. 'Jesus Christ,' for instance, only occurs, if I count aright, twice in Matthew, once in Mark, twice in John. But if you turn to the Epistles and the latter books of the Scriptures, the proportions are reversed. There you have a number of instances of the occurrence of such combinations as 'Jesus Christ,' 'Christ Jesus,' 'The Lord Jesus,' 'Christ the Lord,' and more rarely the full solemn title, 'The Lord Jesus Christ,' but the occurrence of the proper name 'Jesus' alone is the exception. So far as I know, there are only some thirty or forty instances of its use singly in the whole of the books of the New Testament outside of the four Evangelists. The occasions where it is used are all of them occasions in which one may see that the writer's intention is to put strong emphasis, for some reason or other, on the Manhood of our Lord Jesus, and to assert, as broadly as may be, His entire participation with us in the common conditions of our human nature, corporeal and mental.

And I think I shall best bring out the meaning and worth of the name by putting a few of these instances before you.

For example, more than once we find phrases like these: 'we believe that *Jesus* died,' 'having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of *Jesus*,' and the like—which emphasise His death as the death of a man like ourselves, and bring us close to the historical reality of His human pains and agonies for us. '*Christ* died' is a statement which makes the purpose and efficacy of His death more plain, but '*Jesus* died' shows us His death as not only the work of the appointed Messiah, but as the act of our brother man, the outcome of His human love, and never rightly to be understood if His work be thought of apart from His personality.

There is brought into view, too, prominently, the side of Christ's sufferings which we are all apt to forget—the common human side of His agonies and His pains. I know that a certain school of preachers, and some unctuous religious hymns, and other forms of composition, dwell, a great deal too much for reverence, upon the mere physical aspect of Christ's sufferings. But the temptation, I believe, with most of us is to dwell too little upon that,—to argue about the death of Christ, to think about it as a matter of speculation, to regard it as a mysterious power, to look upon it as an official act of the Messiah who was sent into the world for us; and to forget that He bore a manhood like our own, a body that was impatient of pains and wounds and sufferings, and a human life which, like all human lives, naturally recoiled and shrank from the agony of death.

And whilst, therefore, the great message, 'It is Christ that died,' is ever to be pondered, we have also to think with sympathy and gratitude on the homelier representation coming nearer to our hearts, which proclaims that 'Jesus died.' Let us not forget the Brother's manhood that had to agonise and to suffer and to die as the price of our salvation.

Again, when the Scripture would set our Lord before us, as in His humanity, our pattern and example, it sometimes uses this name, in order to give emphasis to the thought of His Manhood—as, for example, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith.' That is to say—a mighty stimulus to all brave perseverance in our efforts after higher Christian nobleness lies in the vivid and constant realisation of the true manhood of our Lord, as the type of all goodness, as having Himself lived by faith, and that in a perfect degree and manner. We are to turn away our eyes from contemplating all other lives and motives, and to 'look off' from them to Him. In all our struggles let us think of Him. Do not take poor human creatures for your ideal of excellence, nor tune your harps to their keynotes. To imitate men is degradation, and is sure to lead to deformity. None of them is a safe guide. Black veins are in the purest marble, and flaws in the most lustrous diamonds. But to imitate Jesus is freedom, and to be like Him is perfection. Our code of morals is His life. He is the Ideal incarnate. The secret of all progress is, 'Run—looking unto Jesus.'

Then, again, we have His manhood emphasised when His sympathy is to be commended to our hearts. 'The great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens' is '*Jesus*' . . . 'who was in all points tempted like as we are.' To every sorrowing soul, to all men burdened with heavy tasks, unwelcome duties, pains and sorrows of the imagination, or of the heart, or of memory, or of physical life, or of circumstances—to all there comes the thought, 'Every ill that flesh is heir to' He knows by experience, and in the Man Jesus we find not only the pity of a God, but the sympathy of a Brother.

When one of our princes goes for an afternoon into the slums in East London, everybody says, and says deservedly, 'right!' and 'princely!' *This* prince has learned pity in 'the huts where poor men lie,' and knows by experience all their squalor and misery. The Man Jesus is the sympathetic Priest. The Rabbis, who did not usually see very far into the depth of things, yet caught a wonderful glimpse when they said: 'Messias will be found sitting outside the gate of the city *amongst the lepers*.' That *is* where He sits; and the perfectness of His sympathy, and the completeness of His identification of Himself with all our tears and our sorrows, are taught us when we read that our High Priest is not merely Christ the Official, but Jesus the Man.

And then we find such words as these: 'If we believe that *Jesus* died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him': I think any one that reads with sympathy must feel how very much closer to our hearts that consolation comes, 'Jesus rose again,' than even the mighty word which the Apostle uses on another occasion, 'Christ is risen from the dead.' The one tells us of the risen Redeemer, the other tells us of the risen Brother. And wherever there are sorrowing souls, enduring loss and following their dear ones into the darkness with yearning hearts, they are comforted when they feel that the beloved dead lie down beside their Brother, and with their Brother they shall rise again.

So, again, most strikingly, and yet somewhat singularly, in the words of Scripture which paint most loftily the exaltation of the risen Saviour to the right hand of God, and His wielding of absolute power and authority, it is the old human name that is used; as if the writers would bind together the humiliation and the exaltation, and were holding up hands of wonder at the thought that a Man had risen thus to the Throne of the Universe. What an emphasis and glow of hope there is in such words as these: 'We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see *Jesus*'—the very Man that was here with us—'crowned with glory and honour.' So in the Book of the Revelation the chosen name for Him who sits amidst the glories of the heavens, and settles the destinies of the universe, and orders the course of history, is Jesus. As if the Apostle would assure us that the face which looked down upon him from amidst the blaze of the glory was indeed the face that he knew long ago upon earth, and the breast that 'was girded with a golden girdle' was the breast upon which he so often had leaned his happy head.

So the ties that bind us to the Man Jesus should be the human bonds that knit us to one another, transferred to Him and purified and strengthened. All that we have failed to find in men we can find in Him. Human wisdom has its limits, but here is a Man whose word is truth, who is Himself the truth. Human love is sometimes hollow, often impotent; it looks down upon us, as a great thinker has said, like the Venus of Milo, that lovely statue, smiling in pity, but it has no arms. But here is a love that is mighty to help, and on which we can rely without disappointment or loss. Human excellence is always limited and imperfect, but here is One whom we may imitate and be pure. So let us do like that poor woman in the Gospel story—bring our precious alabaster box of ointment—the love of these hearts of ours, which is the most precious thing we have to give. The box of ointment that we have so often squandered upon unworthy heads—let us come and pour it upon His, not unmingled with our tears, and anoint Him, our beloved and our King. This Man has loved each of us with a brother's heart; let us love Him with all our hearts.

II. So much for the first name. The second—'Christ'—is the name of office, and brings to us a Redeemer.

I need not dwell at any length upon the original significance and force of the name; it is familiar, of course, to us all. It stands as a transference into Greek of the Hebrew Messias; the one and the other meaning, as we all know, the 'Anointed.' But what is the meaning of claiming for Jesus that He is anointed? A sentence will answer the question. It means that He fulfils all which the inspired imagination of the great ones of the past had seen in that dim Figure that rose before prophet and psalmist. It means that He is anointed or inspired by the divine indwelling to be Prophet, Priest, and King all over the world. It means that He is—though the belief had faded away from the minds of His generation—a sufferer whilst a Prince, and appointed to 'turn away unrighteousness' from the world, and not from 'Jacob' only, by a sacrifice and a death.

I cannot see less in the contents of the Jewish idea, the prophetic idea, of the Messias, than these points: divine inspiration or anointing; a sufferer who is to redeem; the fulfiller of all the rapturous visions of psalmist and of prophet in the past.

And so, when Peter stood up amongst that congregation of wondering strangers and scowling Pharisees, and said, 'The Man that died on the Cross, the Rabbi-peasant from half-heathen Galilee, is the Person to whom Law and Prophets have been pointing,'—no wonder that no one believed him except those whose hearts were touched, for it is never possible for the common mind, at any epoch, to believe that a man who stands beside them is very much bigger than themselves. Great men have always to die, and get a halo of distance around them, before their true stature can be seen.

And now two remarks are all I can afford myself upon this point, and one is this: the hearty recognition of His Messiahship is the centre of all discipleship. The earliest and the simplest Christian creed, which yet—like the little brown roll in which the infant beech-leaves lie folded up—contains in itself all the rest, was this: 'Jesus is Christ.' Although it is no part of my business to say how much imperfection and confusion of head comprehension may co-exist with a heart acceptance of Jesus that saves a soul from sin, yet I cannot in faithfulness to my own convictions conceal my belief that he who contents himself with 'Jesus' and does not grasp 'Christ' has cast away the most valuable and characteristic part of the Christianity which he professes. Surely a most simple inference is that a *Christian* is at least a man who recognises the Christship of Jesus. And I press that upon you, my friends. It is not enough for the sustenance of your own souls and for the cultivation of a vigorous religious life that men should admire, howsoever profoundly and deeply, the humanity of the Lord unless that humanity leads them on to see the office of the Messiah to whom their whole hearts cleave. 'Jesus is the Christ' is the minimum Christian creed.

And then, still further, let me remind you how the recognition of Jesus as Christ is essential to giving its full value to the facts of the manhood. 'Jesus died!' Yes. What then? What is that to me? Is that all that I have to say? If His is simply a human death, like all others, I want to know what makes the story of it a Gospel. I want to know what more interest I have in it than I have in the death of Socrates, or in the death of any man or woman whose name was in the obituary column of yesterday's newspaper. 'Jesus died.' That is a fact. What is wanted to turn the fact into a gospel? That I shall know who it was that died, and why He died. 'I declare unto you the gospel which I preach,' Paul says, 'how that *Christ* died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.' The belief that the death of Jesus was the death of the Christ is needful in order that it shall be the means of my deliverance from the burden of sin. If it be only the death of Jesus, it is beautiful, pathetic, as many another martyr's has been, but if it be the death of Christ, then 'my faith can lay her hand' on that great Sacrifice 'and know her guilt was there.'

So in regard to His perfect example. If we only see

His manhood when we are 'looking unto Jesus, the contemplation of His perfection would be as paralysing as spectacles of supreme excellence usually are. But when we can say, '*Christ* also suffered for us, leaving us an example,' and so can deepen the thought of His Manhood into that of His Messiahship, and the conception of His work as example into that of His work as sacrifice, we can hope that His divine power will dwell in us to mould our lives to the likeness of His human life of perfect obedience.

So in regard to His Resurrection and glorious Ascension to the right hand of God. We have not only to think of the solitary man raised from the grave and caught up to the throne. If it were only 'Jesus' who rose and ascended, His Resurrection and Ascension might be as much to us as the raising of Lazarus, or the rapture of Elijah—namely, a demonstration that death did not destroy conscious being, and that a man could rise to heaven; but they would be no more. But if '*Christ* is risen from the dead,' He is 'become the first-fruits of them that slept.' If *Jesus* has gone up on high, others may or may not follow in His train. He may show that manhood is not incapable of elevation to heaven, but has no power to draw others up after Him. But if *Christ* is gone up, He is gone to prepare a place for us, not to fill a solitary throne, and His Ascension is the assurance that He will lift us too to dwell with Him and share His triumph over death and sin.

Most of the blessedness and beauty of His Example, all the mystery and meaning of His Death, and all the power of His Resurrection, depend on the fact that 'it is *Christ* that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God.'

III. 'The Lord' is the name of dignity and brings before us the King.

There are three grades, so to speak, of dignity expressed by this one word 'Lord' in the New Testament. The lowest is that in which it is almost the equivalent of our own English title of respectful courtesy, 'Sir,' in which sense it is often used in the Gospels, and applied to our Lord as to many other of the persons there. The second is that in which it expresses dignity and authority—and in that sense it is frequently applied to Christ. The third and highest is that in which it is the equivalent of the Old Testament 'Lord,' as a divine name; in which sense also it is applied to Christ in the New Testament.

The first and last of these may be left out of consideration now: the central one is the meaning of the word here. I have only time to touch upon two thoughts—to connect this name of dignity first with one and then with the other of the two names that we have already considered.

Jesus is Lord, that is to say, wonderful as it is, His manhood is exalted to supreme dignity. It is the teaching of the New Testament, that in Jesus, the Child of Mary, our nature sits on the throne of the universe and rules over all things. Those rude herdsmen, brothers of Joseph, who came into Pharaoh's palace—strange contrast to their tents!—there found their brother ruling over that ancient and highly civilised land! We have the Man Jesus for the Lord over all. Trust His dominion and rejoice in His rule, and bow before His authority. Jesus is Lord.

Christ is Lord. That is to say: His sovereign authority and dominion are built upon the fact of His being Deliverer, Redeemer, Sacrifice. His Kingdom is a Kingdom that rests upon His suffering. 'Wherefore God also hath exalted Him, and given Him a Name that is above every name.'

It is because He wears a vesture dipped in blood, that 'on the vesture is the name written "King of kings, and Lord of lords."' It is 'because He shall deliver the needy when he crieth,' as the prophetic psalm has it, that 'all kings shall fall down before Him and all nations shall serve Him.' Because He has given His life for the world He is the Master of the World. His humanity is raised to the throne because His humanity stooped to the cross. As long as men's hearts can be touched by absolute unselfish surrender, and as long as they can know the blessedness of responsive surrender, so long will He who gave Himself for the world be the Sovereign of the world, and the First-born from the dead be the Prince of all the kings of the earth.

And so, dear friends, our thoughts to-day all point to this lesson—do not you content yourselves with a maimed Christ. Do not tarry in the Manhood; do not think it enough to cherish reverence for the nobility of His soul, the gentle wisdom of His words, the beauty of His character, the tenderness of His compassion. All these will be insufficient for your needs. There is more in His mission than these—even His death for you and for all men. Take Him for your Christ, but do not lose the Person in the Work, any more than you lose the work in the Person. And be not content with an intellectual recognition of Him, but bring Him the faith which cleaves to Him and His work as its only hope and peace, and the love which, because of His work as Christ, flows out to the beloved Person who has done it all. Thus loving

Jesus and trusting Christ, you will bring obedience to your Lord and homage to your King, and learn the sweetness and power of 'the name that is above every name'—the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

May we all be able, with clear and unfaltering conviction of our understandings and loving affiance of our whole souls, to repeat as our own the grand words in which so many centuries have proclaimed their faith—words which shed a spell of peacefulness over stormy lives, and fling a great light of hope into the black jaws of the grave: 'I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord!'

A FOURFOLD CORD

'And they continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.'—ACTS ii. 42.

THE Early Church was not a pattern for us, and the idea of its greatly superior purity is very largely a delusion. But still, though that be true, the occasional glimpses that we get at intervals in the early chapters of this Book of the Acts of the Apostles do present a very instructive and beautiful picture of what a Christian society may be, and therefore of what Christian Churches and Christian individuals ought to be.

The words that I have read, however, are not the description of the demeanour of the whole community, but of that portion of it which had been added so swiftly to the original nucleus on the Day of Pentecost. Think, on the morning of that day 'the number of the names was one hundred and twenty,' on the evening of that day it was three thousand over that number—a sufficiently swift and large increase to have swamped the original nucleus, unless there had been a great power of assimilation to itself lodged in that little body. These new converts held to the Apostolic 'doctrine' and 'fellowship,' and to 'breaking of bread' and to 'prayers,' and so became homogeneous with the others, and all worked to one end.

Now, these four points which are signalised in this description may well afford us material for consideration. They give us the ideal of a Church's inner life, which in the divine order should precede, and be the basis of, a Church's work in the world. But, while we speak of an ideal for a Church, let us not forget that it is realised only by the lives of individuals being conformed to it.

I. The first point, which is fundamental to all the others, is 'They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine.'

An earnest desire after fuller knowledge is the basis of all healthy Christian life. We cannot realise, without a great effort, the ignorance of these new converts. 'Parthians and Medes and Elamites,' and Jews gathered from every corner of the Roman world, they had come up to Jerusalem, and the bulk of them knew no more about Christ and Christianity than what they picked up out of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. But that was enough to change their hearts and their wills and to lead them to a real faith. And though the *contents* of their faith were very incomplete, the *power* of their faith was very great. For there is no necessary connection between the amount believed and the grasp with which it is held. Believing, they were eager for more light to be poured on to their half-seeing eyes. They had no Gospels, they had no written record, they had no means of learning anything about the faith which they were now professing except listening to one or other of the original Eleven, with the addition of any of the other 'old disciples'—that is, *early* disciples—who might perchance have equal claims to be listened to as 'witnesses from the beginning.' We shall very much misunderstand the meaning of the words here, if we suppose that these novices were dosed with theological instruction, or that 'the Apostles' doctrine' consisted of such fully developed truths as we find later on in Paul's writings. If you will look at the first sermons that Peter is recorded as having delivered, in the early chapters of the Acts, you will find that he by no means enunciates a definite theology such as he unfolds in his later Epistle. There is no word about the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ; His designation is 'Thy holy child Jesus.' There is no word about the atoning nature of Christ's sacrifice; His death is simply the great crime of the Jewish people, and His Resurrection the great divine fact witnessing to the truth of His Messiahship. All that which we now regard, and rightly regard, as the very centre and living focus of divine truth was but beginning to shine out on the Apostles' minds, or rather to gather itself into form, and to shape itself by slow degrees into propositions. 'The Apostles' teaching'—for 'doctrine' does not convey to modern ears what Luke meant by the word—must have been very largely, if not exclusively, of the same kind as is preserved to us in the four Gospels, and especially in the first three of them. The recital to these listeners, to whom it was all so fresh and strange and transcendent, of the story that has become worn and commonplace to us by its familiarity, of Christ in His birth, Christ in His gentleness, Christ in His deeds, Christ in the deep words that the Apostles were only beginning to understand; Christ in His Death, Resurrection, and Ascension—these were the themes on the narration of which this company of three thousand waited with such eagerness.

But, of course, there was necessarily involved in the story a certain amount of what we now call doctrine—that is, theological teaching—because one cannot tell the story of Jesus Christ, as it is told in the four Gospels, without impressing upon the hearers the conviction that His nature was divine and that His death was a sacrifice. Beyond these truths we know not how far the Apostles went. To these, perhaps, they did not at first rise. But whether they did so or no, and although the facts that the hearers were thus eager to receive, and treasured when they received, are the commonplaces of our Sunday-schools, and quite uninteresting to many of us, the spirit which marked these early converts is the spirit that must lie at the foundation of progressive and healthy Christianity in us. The consciousness of our own ignorance, of the great sweep of God's revealed mind and will, the eager desire to fill up the gaps in the circle, and to widen the diameter, of our knowledge, and the consequent steadfastness and persistence of our continuance in the teachings—far fuller and deeper and richer and nobler than were heard in the upper room at Jerusalem by the first three thousand—which, through the divine Spirit and the experience of the Church for nineteen hundred years are available for us, ought to characterise us all.

Now, dear friends, ask yourselves the question very earnestly, Does this desire of fuller Christian knowledge at all mark my Christian character, and does it practically influence my Christian conduct and life? There are thousands of men and women in all our churches who know no more about the rich revelation of God in Jesus Christ than they did on that day long, long ago, when first they began to apprehend that He was the Saviour of their souls. When I sometimes get glimpses into the utter Biblical ignorance of educated members of my own and of other congregations, I am appalled; I do not wonder how we ministers do so little by our preaching, when the minds of the people to whom we speak are so largely in such a chaotic state in reference to Scriptural truth. I believe that there is an intolerance of plain, sober, instructive Christian teaching from the pulpit, which is one of the worst signs of the Christianity of this generation. And I believe that there are a terribly large number of professing Christians, and good people after a fashion, whose Bibles are as clean to-day, except on one or two favourite pages, as they were when they came out of the bookseller's shop years and years ago. You will never be strong Christians, you will never be happy ones, until you make conscience of the study of God's Word and 'continue steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching.' You may produce plenty of emotional Christianity, and of busy and sometimes fussy work without it, but you will not get depth. I sometimes think that the complaint of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews might be turned upside down nowadays. He says: 'When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles.' Nowadays we might say in Sunday-schools and other places of church work: 'When for the time ye ought to be *learners*, you have taken to teaching before you know what you are teaching, and so neither you nor your scholars will profit much.' The vase should be full before you begin to empty it.

Again, there ought to be, and we ought to aim after, an equable temper of mutual brotherhood conquering selfishness.

'They continued in the Apostles' doctrine and in fellowship.' 'Fellowship' here, as I take it, applies to community of feeling. A verse or two afterwards it is applied to community of goods, but we have nothing to do with that subject at present. What is meant is that these three thousand, as was most natural, cut off altogether from their ancient associations, finding themselves at once separated by a great gulf from their nation and its hopes and its religion, were driven together as sheep are when wolves are prowling around. And, being individually weak, they held on by one another, so that many weaknesses might make a strength, and glimmering embers raked together might break into a flame.

Now, all these circumstances, or almost all of them, that drove the primitive believers together, are at an end, and the tendencies of this day are rather to drive Christian people apart than to draw them together. Differences of position, occupation, culture, ways of looking at things, views of Christian truth and the like, all come powerfully in to the reinforcement of the natural selfishness which tempts us all, unless the grace of God overcomes it. Although we do not want any hysterical or histrionic presentation of Christian sympathy and brotherhood, we do need—far more than any of us have awakened to the consciousness of the need—for the health of our own souls we need to make definite efforts to cultivate more of that sense of Christian brotherhood with all that hold the same Lord Christ, and to realise this truth: that they and we, however separate, are nearer one another than are we and those nearest to us who do not share in our Christian faith.

I do not dwell upon this point. It is one on which it is easy to gush, and it has got a bad name because there has been so much unreal and sickly talk about it. But if any Christian man will honestly try to cultivate the brotherly feeling which my text suggests, and to which our common relation to Jesus Christ binds us, and will try it in reference to *A*, *B*, or *C*, whom he does not much like, with whose ways he has no kind of sympathy, whom he believes to be a heretic, and who perhaps returns the belief about him with interest, he will find it is a pretty sharp test of his Christian principle. Let us be real, at any rate, and not pretend to have more love than we really have in our hearts. And let us remember that 'he that loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.'

II. Another characteristic which comes out in the words before us is the blending of worship with life.

'They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine . . . and in breaking of bread.' Commentators who can only see one thing at a time—and there are a good many of that species—have got up great discussions as to whether this phrase means eating ordinary meals or partaking of the Lord's Supper. I venture to say it means both, because, clearly enough, in the beginning, the common meal was hallowed by what we now call the Lord's Supper being associated with it, and every day's evening repast was eaten 'in remembrance of Him.'

So, naturally, and without an idea of anything awful or sacred about the rite, the first Christians, when they went home after a hard day's work and sat down to take their own suppers, blessed the bread and the wine, and whether they ate or drank, did the one and the other 'in remembrance of Him.'

The gradual growth of the sentiment attaching to the Lord's Supper, until it reached the portentous height of regarding it as a 'tremendous sacrifice,' which could only be administered by priests with ordained hands in Apostolic succession, can be partly traced even in New Testament times. The Lord's Supper began as an appendage to, or rather as a heightening of, the evening meal, and at first, as this chapter tells us in a subsequent verse, was observed day by day. Then, before the epoch of the Acts of the Apostles is ended, we find it has become a weekly celebration, and forms part of the service on the first day of the week. But even when the observance had ceased to be daily, the association with an ordinary meal continued, and that led to the disorders at Corinth which Paul rebuked, and which would have been impossible if later ideas of the Lord's Supper had existed then.

The history of the transformation of that simple Supper into 'the bloodless sacrifice' of the Mass, and all the mischief consequent thereon, does not concern us now. But it does concern us to note that these first believers hallowed common things by doing them, and common food by partaking of it, with the memory of His great sacrifice in their minds. The poorest fare, the coarsest bread, the sourest wine, on the humblest table, became a memorial of that dear Lord. Religion and life, the domestic and the devout, were so closely braided together that when a household sat at table it was both a family and a church; and while they were eating their meat for the strength of their body, they were partaking of the memorial of their dying Lord.

Is your house like that? Is your daily life like that? Do you bring the sacred and the secular as close together as that? Are the dying words of your Master, 'This do in remembrance of Me,' written by you over everything you do? And so is all life worship, and all worship hope?

III. The last thing here is habitual devotion.

I suppose the disciples had no forms of set Christian prayers. They still used the Jewish liturgy, for we read that 'they continued daily with one accord in the Temple.' I am sure that no two things can be less like one another than the worship of the primitive Church and the worship, say, of one of our congregations. Did you ever try to paint for yourselves, for instance, the scene described in the First Epistle to the Corinthians? When they came together in their meetings for worship, 'every one had a psalm, a doctrine, an interpretation.' 'Let the prophets speak, by ones, or at most by twos'; and if another gets up to interrupt, let the first speaker sit down. Paul goes on to say, 'Let all things be done decently and in order.' So there must have been tendencies to disorder, and much at which some of our modern ecclesiastical martinets would have been very much scandalised as 'unbecoming.' Wise men are in no haste to change forms. Forms change of themselves when their users change; but it would be a good day for Christendom if the faith and devoutness of a community of believers such as we, for instance, profess to be, were so strong and so demanding expression as that, instead of my poor voice continually sounding here, every one of you had a psalm or a doctrine, and every one of you were able and impelled to speak out of the fulness of the Spirit which

God poured into you. It will come some day; it must come if Christendom is not to die of its own dignity. But we do not need to hurry matters, only let us remember that unless a Church continues steadfast in prayer it is worth very little.

Now, dear brethren, it is said about us Free Churchmen that we think a great deal too much of preaching and a great deal too little of the prayers of the congregation. That is a stock criticism. I am bound to say that there is a grain of truth in it, and that there is not, with too many of our congregations, as lofty a conception of the power and blessedness of the united prayers of the congregation as there ought to be, or else you would not hear about 'introductory services.' Introductory to what? Do we speak to God merely by way of preface to one of us talking to his brethren? Is that the proper order? 'They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching,' no doubt; but also 'steadfastly in prayer.' I pray you to try to make this picture of the Pentecostal converts the ideal of your own lives, and to do your best to help forward the time when it shall be the reality in this church, and in every other society of professing Christians.

A PURE CHURCH AN INCREASING CHURCH

'And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.'—ACTS ii. 47.

'And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved.'—(R.V.)

YOU observe that the principal alterations of these words in the Revised Version are two: the one the omission of 'the church,' the other the substitution of 'were being saved' for 'such as should be saved.' The former of these changes has an interest as suggesting that at the early period referred to the name of 'the church' had not yet been definitely attached to the infant community, and that the word afterwards crept into the text at a time when ecclesiasticism had become a great deal stronger than it was at the date of the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. The second of the changes is of more importance. The Authorised Version's rendering suggests that salvation is a future thing, which in one aspect is partially true. The Revised Version, which is also by far the more literally accurate, suggests the other idea, that salvation is a process going on all through the course of a Christian man's life. And that carries very large and important lessons.

I. I ask you to notice here, first, the profound conception which the writer had of the present action of the ascended Christ. 'The Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved.'

Then Christ (for it is He that is here spoken of as the Lord), the living, ascended Christ, was present in, and working with, that little community of believing souls. You will find that the thought of a present Saviour, who is the life-blood of the Church on earth, and the spring of action for all good that is done in it and by it, runs through the whole of this Book of the Acts of the Apostles. The keynote is struck in its first verses: 'The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up.' That is the description of Luke's Gospel, and it implies that the Acts of the Apostles is the *second* treatise, which tells all that Jesus continued to do and teach *after* that He was taken up. So the Lord, the ascended Christ, is the true theme and hero of this book. It is He, for instance, who sends down the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It is He whom the dying martyr sees 'standing at the right hand of God,' ready to help. It is He who appears to the persecutor on the road to Damascus. It is He who sends Paul and his company to preach in Europe. It is He who opens hearts for the reception of their message. It is He who stands by the Apostle in a vision, and bids him 'be of good cheer,' and go forth upon his work. Thus, at every crisis in the history of the Church, it is the Lord —that is to say, Christ Himself—who is revealed as working in them and for them, the ascended but yet ever-present Guide, Counsellor, Inspirer, Protector, and Rewarder of them that put their trust in Him. So here it is He that 'adds to the Church daily them that were being saved.'

I believe, dear brethren, that modern Christianity has far too much lost the vivid impression of this present Christ as actually dwelling and working among us. What is good in us and what is bad in us conspire to make us think more of the past work of an ascended Christ than of the present work of an indwelling Christ. We cannot think too much of that Cross by which He has laid the foundation for the salvation and reconciliation of all the world; but we may easily think too exclusively of it, and so fix our thoughts upon that work which He completed when on Calvary He said, 'It is finished!' as to forget the continual work which will never be finished until His Church is perfected, and the world is redeemed. If we are a Church of Christ at all, we have Christ in very deed among us, and working through us and on us. And unless we have, in no mystical and unreal and metaphorical sense, but in the simplest and yet grandest prose reality, that living

Saviour here in our hearts and in our fellowship, better that these walls were levelled with the ground, and this congregation scattered to the four winds of heaven. The present Christ is the life of His Church.

Notice, and that but for a moment, for I shall have to deal with it more especially at another part of this discourse,—the specific action which is here ascribed to Him. *He* adds to the Church, not *we*, not our preaching, not our eloquence, our fervour, our efforts. These may be the weapons in His hands, but the hand that wields the weapon gives it all its power to wound and to heal, and it is Christ Himself who, by His present energy, is here represented as being the Agent of all the good that is done by any Christian community, and the Builder-up of His Churches, in numbers and in power.

It is His will for, His ideal of, a Christian Church, that continuously it should be gathering into its fellowship those that are being saved. That is His meaning in the establishment of His Church upon earth, and that is His will concerning it and concerning us, and the question should press on every society of Christians: Does our reality correspond to Christ's ideal? Are we, as a portion of His great heritage, being continually replenished by souls that come to tell what God has done for them? Is there an unbroken flow of such into what we call our communion? I speak to you members of this church, and I ask you to ponder the question,—Is it so? and the other question, If it is not so, wherefore? 'The Lord added daily,'—why does not the Lord add daily to us?

II. Let us go to the second part of this text, and see if we can find an answer. Notice how emphatically there is brought out here the attractive power of an earnest and pure Church.

My text is the end of a sentence. What is the beginning of the sentence? Listen,—'All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added.' Yes; of course. Suppose you were like these people. Suppose this church and congregation bore stamped upon it, plain and deep as the broad arrow of the king, these characteristics — manifest fraternal unity, plain unselfish unworldliness, habitual unbroken devotion, gladness which had in it the solemnity of Heaven, and a transparent simplicity of life and heart, which knew nothing of by-ends and shabby, personal motives or distracting duplicity of purpose—do you not think that the Lord would add to you daily such as should be saved? Or, to put it into other words, wherever there is a little knot of men obviously held together by a living Christ, and obviously manifesting in their lives and characters the likeness of that Christ transforming and glorifying them, there will be drawn to them—by natural gravitation, I was going to say, but we may more correctly say, by the gravitation which is natural in the supernatural realm — souls that have been touched by the grace of the Lord, and souls to whom that grace has been brought the nearer by looking upon *them*. Wherever there is inward vigour of life there will be outward growth; and the Church which is pure, earnest, living will be a Church which spreads and increases.

Historically, it has always been the case that in

God's Church seasons of expansion have followed upon seasons of deepened spiritual life on the part of His people. And the only kind of growth which is wholesome, and to be desired in a Christian community, is growth as a consequence of the revived religiousness of the individuals who make up the community.

And just in like manner as such a community will draw to it men who are like-minded, so it will repel from it all the formalist people. There are congregations that have the stamp of worldliness so deep upon them that any persons who want to be burdened with as little religion as may be respectable will find themselves at home there. And I come to you Christian people here, for whose Christian character I am in some sense and to some degree responsible, with this appeal: Do you see to it that, so far as your influence extends, this community of ours be such as that half-dead Christians will never think of coming near us, and those whose religion is tepid will be repelled from us, but that they who love the Lord Jesus Christ with earnest devotion and lofty consecration, and seek to live unworldly and saint-like lives, shall recognise in us men like-minded, and from whom they may draw help. I beseech you—if you will not misunderstand the expression—make your communion such that it will repel as well as attract, and that people will find nothing here to draw them to an easy religion of words and formalism, beneath which all vermin of worldliness and selfishness may lurk, but will recognise in us a church of men and women who are bent upon holiness, and longing for more and more conformity to the divine Master.

Now, if all this be true, it is possible for worldly and stagnant communities calling themselves 'Churches' to thwart Christ's purpose, and to make it both impossible and undesirable that He should add to them souls for whom He has died. It is a solemn thing to feel that we may clog Christ's chariot-wheels, that there may be so little spiritual life in us, as a congregation, that, if I may so say, He dare not intrust us with the responsibility of guarding and keeping the young converts whom He loves and tends. We may not be fit to be trusted with them, and that may be why we do not get them. It may not be good for them that they should be dropped into the refrigerating atmosphere of such a church, and that may be why they do not come.

Depend upon it, brethren, that, far more than my preaching, your lives will determine the expansion of this church of ours. And if my preaching is pulling one way and your lives the other, and I have half an hour a week for talk and you have seven days for contradictory life, which of the two do you think is likely to win in the tug? I beseech you, take the words that I am now trying to speak, to yourselves. Do not pass them to the man in the next pew and think how well they fit him, but accept them as needed by you. And remember, that just as a bit of sealing-wax, if you rub it on your sleeve and so warm it, develops an attractive power, the Church which is warmed will draw many to itself. If the earlier words of this context apply to any Christian community, then certainly its blessed promise too will apply to it, and to such a church the Lord will 'add day by day them that are being saved.'

III. And now, lastly, observe the definition given here of the class of persons gathered into the community.

I have already observed, in the earlier portion of this discourse, that here we have salvation represented as a process, a progressive thing which runs on all through life. In the New Testament there are various points of view from which that great idea of salvation is represented. It is sometimes spoken of as past, in so far as in the definite act of conversion and the first exercise of faith in Jesus Christ the whole subsequent evolution and development are involved, and the process of salvation has its beginning then, when a man turns to God. It is sometimes spoken of as present, in so far as the joy of deliverance from evil and possession of good, which is God, is realised day by day. It is sometimes spoken of as future, in so far as all the imperfect possession and pre-libations of salvation which we taste here on earth prophesy and point onwards to their own perfecting in the climax of heaven. But all these three points of view, past, present, and future, may be merged into this one of my text, which speaks of every saint on earth, from the infantile to the most mature, as standing in the same row, though at different points; walking on the same road, though advanced different distances; all participant of the same process of 'being saved.'

Through all life the deliverance goes on, the deliverance from sin, the deliverance from wrath. The Christian salvation, then, according to the teaching of this emphatic phrase, is a process begun at conversion, carried on progressively through the life, and reaching its climax in another state. Day by day, through the spring and the early summer, the sun shines longer in the sky, and rises higher in the heavens; and the path of the Christian is as the shining light. Last year's greenwood is this year's hardwood; and the Christian, in like manner, has to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour.' So these progressively, and, therefore, as yet imperfectly, saved people, were gathered into the Church.

Now I have but two things to say about that. If that be the description of the kind of folk that come into a Christian Church, the duties of that Church are very plainly marked. And the first great one is to see to it that the community help the growth of its members. There are Christian Churches—I do not say whether ours is one of them or not—into which, if a young plant is brought, it is pretty sure to be killed. The temperature is so low that the tender shoots are nipped as with frost, and die. I have seen people, coming all full of fervour and of faith, into Christian congregations, and finding that the average round them was so much lower than their own, that they have cooled down after a time to the fashionable temperature, and grown indifferent like their brethren. Let us, dear friends, remember that a Christian Church is a nursery of imperfect Christians, and, for ourselves and for one another, try to make our communion such as shall help shy and tender graces to unfold themselves, and woo out, by the encouragement of example, the lowest and the least perfect to lofty holiness and consecration like the Master's.

And if I am speaking to any in this congregation who hold aloof from Christian fellowship for more or less sufficient reasons, let me press upon them, in one word, that if they are conscious of a possession, however imperfect, of that incipient salvation, their place is thereby determined, and they are doing wrong if they do not connect themselves with some Christian Communion, and stand forth as members of Christ's Church.

And now one last word. I have tried to show you that salvation, in the New Testament, is regarded as a process. The opposite thing is a process too. There is a very awful contrast in one of Paul's Epistles. 'The preaching of the Cross is to them *who are in the act of perishing* foolishness; unto us who are *being saved*, it is the power of God.' These two processes start, as it were, from the same point, one by slow degrees and almost imperceptible motion, rising higher and higher, the other, by slow degrees and almost unconscious descent, sliding steadily and fatally downward ever further and further. And my point now is that in each of us one or other of these processes is going on. Either you are slowly rising or you are slipping down. Either a larger measure of the life of Christ, which is salvation, is passing into your hearts, or bit by bit you are dying like some man with creeping paralysis that begins at the extremities, and with fell, silent, inexorable footstep, advances further and further towards the citadel of the heart, where it lays its icy hand at last, and the man is dead. You are either 'being saved' or you are 'perishing.' No man becomes a devil all at once, and no man becomes an angel all at once. Trust yourself to Christ, and He will lift you to Himself; turn your back upon Him, as some of you are doing, and you will settle down, down, down in the muck and the mire of your own sensuality and selfishness, until at last the foul ooze spreads over your head, and you are lost in the bog for ever.

'THEN SHALL THE LAME MAN LEAP AS AN HART'

> 'Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. 2. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; 3. Who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms. 4. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. 5. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. 6. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. 7. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ancle bones received strength. 8. And he leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. 9. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: 10. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. 11. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering. 12. And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? 13. The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. 14. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15. And killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses. 16. And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.'—ACTS iii. 1-16.

'MANY wonders and signs were done by the Apostles' (Acts ii. 43), but this one is recorded in detail, both because it was conspicuous as wrought in the Temple, and because it led to weighty consequences. The narrative is so vivid and full of minute particulars that it suggests an eye-witness. Was Peter Luke's informant? The style of the story is so like that of Mark's Gospel that we might reasonably presume so.

The scene and the persons are first set before us. It was natural that a close alliance should be cemented between Peter and John, both because they were the principal members of the quartet which stood first among the Apostles, and because they were so unlike each other, and therefore completed each other. Peter's practical force and eye for externals, and John's more contemplative nature and eye for the unseen, needed one another. So we find them together in the judgment hall, at the sepulchre, and here.

They 'went up to the Temple,' or, to translate more exactly and more picturesquely, 'were going up,' when the incident to be recorded stayed them. They had passed through the court, and came to a gate leading into the inner court, which was called Beautiful, from its artistic excellence, when they were arrested by the sight of a lame beggar, who had been carried there every day for many years to appeal, by the display of his helplessness, to the entering worshippers. Precisely similar sights may be seen to-day at the doors of many a famous European church and many a mosque. He mechanically wailed out his formula, apparently scarcely looking at the two strangers, nor expecting a response. Long habit and many rebuffs had not made him hopeful, but it was his business to ask, and so he asked.

Some quick touch of pity shot through the two friends' hearts, which did not need to be spoken in order that each might feel it to be shared by the other. So they paused, and, as was in keeping with their characters, Peter took speech in hand, while John stood by assenting. Purposed devotion is well delayed when postponed in order to lighten misery.

There must have been something magnetic in Peter's voice and steady gaze as he said, 'Look on us!' It was a strange preface, if only some small coin was to follow. It kindled some flicker of hope of he knew not what in the beggar. He expected to receive 'something' from them, and, no doubt, was asking himself what. Expectation and receptivity were being stirred in him, though he could not divine what was coming. We have no right to assume that his state of mind was operative in fitting him to be cured, nor to call his attitude 'faith,' but still he was lifted from his usual dreary hopelessness, and some strange anticipation was creeping into his heart.

Then comes the grand word of power. Again Peter is spokesman, but John takes part, though silently. With a fixed gaze, which told of concentrated purpose, and went to the lame man's heart, Peter triumphantly avows what most men are ashamed of, and try to hide: 'Silver and gold have I none.' He had 'left all and followed Christ'; he had not made demands on the common stock. Empty pockets may go along with true wealth.

There is a fine flash of exultant confidence in Peter's next words, which is rather spoiled by the Authorised Version. He did not say '*such* as I have,' as if it was inferior to money, which he had not, but he said '*what* I have' (Rev. Ver.),—a very different tone. The expression eloquently magnifies the power which he possessed as far more precious than wealth, and it speaks of his assurance that he did possess it—an assurance which rested, not only on his faith in his Lord's promise and gift, but on his experience in working former miracles.

How deep his words go into the obligations of possession! 'What I have I give' should be the law for all Christians in regard to all that they have, and especially in regard to spiritual riches. God gives us these, not only in order that we may enjoy them ourselves, but in order that we may impart, and so in our measure enter into the joy of our Lord and know the greater blessedness of giving than of receiving. How often it has been true that a poor church has been a miracle-working church, and that, when it could not say 'Silver and gold have I none,' it has also lost the power of saying, 'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk'!

The actual miracle is most graphically narrated. With magnificent boldness Peter rolls out his Master's name, there, in the court of the Temple, careless who may hear. He takes the very name that had been used in scorn, and waves it like a banner of victory. His confidence in his possession of power was not confidence in himself, but in his Lord. When we can peal forth the Name with as much assurance of its miracle-working power as Peter did, we too shall be able to make the lame walk. A faltering voice is unworthy to speak such words, and will speak them in vain.

The process of cure is minutely described. Peter put out his hand to help the lame man up, and, while he was doing so, power came into the shrunken muscles and weak ankles, so that the cripple felt that he could raise himself, and, though all passed in a moment, the last part of his rising was his own doing, and what began with his being 'lifted up' ended in his 'leaping up.' Then came an instant of standing still, to steady himself and make sure of his new strength, and then he began to walk.

The interrupted purpose of devotion could now be pursued, but with a gladsome addition to the company. How natural is that 'walking and leaping and praising God'! The new power seemed so delightful, so wonderful, that sober walking did not serve. It was a strange way of going into the Temple, but people who are borne along by the sudden joy of new gifts beyond hope need not be expected to go quietly, and sticklers for propriety who blamed the man's extravagance. and would have had him pace along with sober gait and downcast eyes, like a Pharisee, did not know what made him thus obstreperous, even in his devout thankfulness. 'Leaping and praising God' do make a singular combination, but before we blame, let us be sure that we understand.

One of the old manuscripts inserts a clause which brings out more clearly that there was a pause, during which the three remained in the Temple in prayer. It reads, 'And when Peter and John came out, he came out with them, holding them, and they [the people] being astonished, stood in the porch,' etc. So we have to think of the buzzing crowd, waiting in the court for their emergence from the sanctuary. Solomon's porch was, like the Beautiful gate, on the east side of the Temple enclosure, and may probably have been a usual place of rendezvous for the brethren, as it had been a resort of their Lord.

It was a great moment, and Peter, the unlearned Galilean, the former cowardly renegade, rose at once to the occasion. Truly it was given him in that hour what to speak. His sermon is distinguished by its undaunted charging home the guilt of Christ's death on the nation, its pitying recognition of the ignorance which had done the deed, and its urgent entreaty. We here deal with its beginning only. 'Why marvel ye at this?'—it would have been a marvel if they had not marvelled. The thing was no marvel to the Apostle, because he believed that Jesus was the Christ and reigned in Heaven. Miracles fall into their place and become supremely 'natural' when we have accepted that great truth.

The fervent disavowal of their 'own power or holiness' as concerned in the healing is more than a modest disclaimer. It leads on to the declaration of who is the true Worker of all that is wrought for men by the hands of Christians. That disavowal has to be constantly repeated by us, not so much to turn away men's admiration or astonishment from us, as to guard our own foolish hearts from taking credit for what it may please Jesus to do by us as His tools.

The declaration of Christ as the supreme Worker is postponed till after the solemn indictment of the nation. But the true way to regard the miracle is set forth at once, as being God's glorifying of Jesus. Peter employs a designation of our Lord which is peculiar to these early chapters of Acts. He calls Him God's 'Servant,' which is a quotation of the Messianic title in the latter part of Isaiah, 'the Servant of the Lord.'

The fiery speaker swiftly passes to contrast God's glorifying with Israel's rejection. The two points on which he seizes are noteworthy. 'Ye delivered Him up'; that is, to the Roman power. That was the deepest depth of Israel's degradation. To hand over their Messiah to the heathen,—what could be completer faithlessness to all Israel's calling and dignity? But that was not all: 'ye denied Him.' Did Peter remember some one else than the Jews who had done the same, and did a sudden throb of conscious fellowship even in that sin make his voice tremble for a moment? Israel's denial was aggravated because it was 'in the presence of Pilate,' and had overborne his determination to release his prisoner. The Gentile judge would rise in the judgment to condemn them, for he had at least seen that Jesus was innocent, and they had hounded him on to an illegal killing, which was murder as laid to his account, but national apostasy as laid to theirs.

These were daring words to speak in the Temple to that crowd. But the humble fisherman had been filled with the Spirit, who is the Strengthener, and the fear of man was dead in him. If we had never heard of Pentecost, we should need to invent something of the sort to make intelligible the transformation of these timid folk, the first disciples, into heroes. A dead Christ, lying in an unknown grave, could never have inspired His crushed followers with such courage, insight, and elastic confidence and gladness in the face of a frowning world.

'THE PRINCE OF LIFE'

'But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15. And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.'—ACTS iii. 14, 15.

THIS early sermon of Peter's, to the people, is marked by a comparative absence of the highest view of Christ's person and work. It is open to us to take one of two explanations of that fact. We may either say that the Apostle was but learning the full significance of the marvellous events that had passed so recently, or we may say that he suited his words to his audience, and did not declare all that he knew.

At the same time, we should not overlook the significance of the Christology which it does contain. 'His child Jesus' is really a translation of Isaiah's 'Servant of the Lord.' 'The Holy One and the Just' is a distinct assertion of Jesus' perfect, sinless manhood, and 'the Prince of Life' plainly asserts Jesus to be the Lord and Source of it.

Notice, too, the pathetic 'denied': was Peter thinking of the shameful hour in his own experience? It is a glimpse into the depth of his penitence, and the tenderness with others' sins which it had given him, that he twice uses the word here, as if he had said 'You have done no more than I did myself. It is not for me to heap reproaches on you. We have been alike in sin—and I can preach forgiveness to you sinners, because I have received it for myself.'

Notice, too, the manifold antitheses of the words. Barabbas is set against Christ; the Holy One and the Just against a robber, the Prince of Life against a murderer. 'You killed'—'the Prince of Life.' 'You killed'—'God raised.'

There are here three paradoxes, three strange and contradictory things: the paradoxes of man's perverted and fatal choice, of man's hate bringing death to the Lord of life, and of God's love and power causing life to come by death.

I. The paradox of man's fatal choice.

There occurs often in history a kind of irony in which the whole tendency of a time or of a conflict is summed up in a single act, and certainly the fact which is referred to here is one of these. Let us put it as it would have seemed to an onlooker then, leaving out for the moment any loftier meaning which may attach to it.

Peter's words here, thus boldly addressed to the people, are a strong testimony to the impression which the character of Christ had made on His contemporaries. 'The Holy One and the Just' implies moral perfection. The whole narrative of the Crucifixion brings out that impression. Pilate's wife speaks with awe of 'that just person.' 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' 'If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil.' 'I find no fault in Him.' We may take it for granted that the impression Jesus made among His contemporaries was, at the lowest, that He was a pure and good man.

The nation had to choose one of two. Jesus was the one; who was the other? A man half brigand, half rebel, who had raised some petty revolt against Rome, more as a pretext for robbery and crime than from patriotism, and whose hands reeked with blood. And this was the nation's hero!

The juxtaposition throws a strong light on the people's motive for rejecting Jesus. The rulers may have condemned Him for blasphemy, but the people had a more practical reason, and in it no doubt the rulers shared. It was not because He claimed to be the Messiah that they gave Him up to Pilate, but because He would not meet their notions of what the Messiah should be and do. If He had called them to arms, not a man of them would have betrayed Him to Pilate, but all, or the more daring of them, would have rallied to His standard. Their hate was the measure of their deep disappointment with His course. If instead of showing love and meekness, He had blown up the coals of religious hatred; if instead of going about doing good, He had mustered the men of lawless Galilee for a revolt, would these fawning hypocrites have dragged him to Pilate on the charge of forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, and of claiming to be a King? Why, there was not one of them but would have been glad to murder every tax-gatherer in Palestine, not one of them but bore inextinguishable in his inmost heart the faith in 'one Christ a King.' And if that meek and silent martyr had only lifted His finger, He might have had legions of His accusers at His back, ready to sweep Pilate and his soldiers out of Jerusalem. They saw Christ's goodness and holiness. It did not attract them. They wanted a Messiah who would bring them outward freedom by the use of outward weapons, and so they all shouted 'Not this man but Barabbas!' The whole history of the nation was condensed in that one cry — their untamable obstinacy, their blindness to the light of God, their fierce grasp of the promises which they did not understand, their hard worldliness, their cruel patriotism, their unquenchable hatred of their oppressors, which was only equalled by their unquenchable hatred of those who showed them the only true way for deliverance.

And this strange paradox is not confined to these Jews. It is repeated wherever Christ is presented to men. We are told that all men naturally admire goodness, and so on. Men mostly know it when they see it, but I doubt whether they all either admire or like it. People generally had rather have something more outward and tangible. It is not spiritualising this incident, but only referring it to the principle of which it is an illustration, to ask you to see in it the fatal choice of multitudes. Christ is set before us all, and His beauty is partially seen but is dimmed by externals. Men's desires are fixed on gross sensuous delights, or on success in business, or on intellectual eminence, or on some of the thousand other visible and temporal objects that outshine, to vulgar eyes, the less dazzling lustre of the things unseen. They appreciate these, and make heroes of the men who have won them. These are their ideals, but of Jesus they have little care.

And is it not true that all such competitors of His, when they lead men to prefer them to Him, are 'murderers,' in a sadder sense than Barabbas was?

Do they not slay the souls of their admirers? Is it not but too ghastly a reality that all who thus choose them draw down ruin on themselves and 'love death'?

This fatal paradox is being repeated every day in the lives of thousands. The crowds who yelled, 'Not this man but Barabbas!' were less guilty and less mad than those who to-day cry, 'Not Jesus but worldly wealth, or fleeting bodily delights, or gratified ambition!'

II. The paradox of Death's seeming conquest over the Lord of Life.

The word rendered 'Prince' means an originator, and hence a leader and hence a lord. Whether Peter had yet reached a conception of the divinity of Jesus or not, he had clearly reached a much higher one of Him than he had attained before His death. In some sense he was beginning to recognise that His relation to 'life' was loftier and more mysterious than that of other men. Was it His death only that thus elevated the disciples' thoughts of Jesus? Strange that if He died and there an end, such a result should have followed. One would have expected His death to have shattered their faith in Him, but somehow it strengthened their faith. Why did they not all continue to lament, as did the two of them on the road to Emmaus: 'We trusted that this had been He who should have redeemed Israel'—but now we trust no more, and our dreams are buried in His grave? Why did they not go back to Galilee and their nets? What raised their spirits, their courage, and increased their understanding of Him, and their faith in Him? How came His death to be the occasion of consolidating, not of shattering, their fellowship? How came Peter to be so sure that a man who had died was the 'Prince of Life'? The answer, the only one psychologically possible, is in what Peter here proclaims to unwilling ears, 'Whom God raised from the dead.'

The fact of the Resurrection sets the fact of the Death in another light. Meditating on these twin facts, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, we hear Himself speaking as He did to John in Patmos: 'I am the Living One who became dead, and lo, I am alive for evermore!'

If we try to listen with the ears of these first hearers of Peter's words, we shall better appreciate his daring paradox. Think of the tremendous audacity of the claim which they make, that Jesus should be the 'Prince of Life,' and of the strange contradiction to it which the fact that they 'killed' Him seems to give. How could death have power over the Prince of Life? That sounds as if, indeed, the 'sun were turned into darkness,' or as if fire became ice. That brief clause 'ye killed the Prince of Life' must have seemed sheer absurdity to the hearers whose hands were still red with the blood of Jesus.

But there is another paradox here. It was strange that death should be able to invade that Life, but it is no less strange that men should be able to inflict it. But we must not forget that Jesus died, not because men slew Him, but because He willed to die. The whole of the narratives of the Crucifixion in the Gospels avoid using the word 'death. Such expressions as He 'gave up the ghost,' or the like, are used, implying what is elsewhere distinctly asserted, that His death was His offering of Himself, the result of His own volition, not of exhaustion or of torture. Thus, even in dying, He showed Himself the Lord of Life and the Master of Death. Men indeed fastened Jesus to the Cross, but He died, not because He was so fastened, but because He willed to 'make His soul an offering for sin.' Bound as it were to a rock in the midst of the ocean, He, of His own will, and at His own time, bowed His head, and let the waves of the sea of death roll over it.

III. The triumphant divine paradox of life given and death conquered through a death.

Jesus is 'Prince' in the sense of being source of life to mankind, just because He died. His death is the death of Death. His apparent defeat is His real victory.

By His death He takes away our sins.

By His death He abolishes death.

The physical fact remains, but all else which makes the 'sting of death' to men is gone. It is no more a solitude, for He has died, and thereby He becomes a companion in that hour to every lover of His. Its darkness changes into light to those who, by 'following Him,' have, even there, 'the light of life.' This Samson carried away the gates of the prison on His own strong shoulders when He came forth from it. It is His to say, 'O death! I will be thy plague.'

By His death He diffuses life.

'The Spirit was not given' till Jesus was 'glorified,' which glorification is John's profound synonym for His crucifixion. When the alabaster box of His pure body was broken, the whole house of humanity was filled with the odour of the ointment.

So the great paradox becomes a blessed truth, that man's deepest sin works out God's highest act of Love and Pardon.

THE HEALING POWER OF THE NAME

'And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.'—ACTS iii. 16.

PETER said, 'Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?' eagerly disclaiming being anything else than a medium through which Another's power operated. Jesus Christ said, 'That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk'—unmistakably claiming to be a great deal more than a medium. Why the difference? Jesus Christ did habitually in His miracles adopt the tone on which Moses once ventured when he smote the rock and said, 'Ye rebels! must *we* bring the water for you?' and he was punished for it by exclusion from the Promised Land. Why the difference? Moses was 'in all his house as a servant, but Christ as a Son over His own house'; and what was arrogance in the servant was natural and reasonable in the Son.

The gist of this verse is a reference to Jesus Christ as a source of miraculous power, not merely because He wrought miracles when on earth, but because from heaven He gave the power of which Peter was but the channel. Now it seems to me that in these emphatic and singularly reduplicated words of the Apostle there are two or three very important lessons which I offer for your consideration.

I. The first is the power of the Name.

Now the Name of which Peter is speaking is not the collocation of syllables which are sounded 'Jesus

Christ.' His hearers were familiar with the ancient and Eastern method of regarding names as very much more than distinguishing labels. They are, in the view of the Old Testament, attempts at a summary description of things by their prominent characteristics. They are condensed definitions. And so the Old Testament uses the expression, the 'Name' of God, as equivalent to 'that which God is manifested to be.' Hence, in later days—and there are some tendencies thither even in Scripture—in Jewish literature 'the Name' came to be a reverential synonym for God Himself. And there are traces that this peculiar usage with regard to the divine Name was beginning to shape itself in the Church with reference to the name of Jesus, even at that period in which my text was spoken. For instance, in the fifth chapter we read that the Apostles 'departed from the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name,' and we find at a much later date that missionaries of the Gospel are described by the Apostle John as going forth 'for the sake of the Name.'

The name of Christ, then, is the representation or embodiment of that which Christ is declared to be for us men, and it is that Name, the totality of what He is manifested to be, in which lies all power for healing and for strengthening. The Name, that is, the whole Christ, in His nature, His offices, His work, His Incarnation, His Life, His Death, Resurrection, Session at the right hand of God—it is this Christ whose Name made that man strong, and will make us strong. Brethren, let us remember that, while fragments of the Name will have fragmentary power, as the curative virtue that resides in any substance belongs to the smallest grain of it, if detached from the mass—whilst fragments of the Name of Christ have power, thanks be to Him! so that no man can have even a very imperfect and rudimentary view of what Jesus Christ is and does, without getting strength and healing in proportion to the completeness of his conception, yet in order to realise all that He can be and do, a man must take the whole Christ as He is revealed.

The Early Church had a symbol for Jesus Christ, a fish, to which they were led because the Greek word for a fish is made up of the initials of the words which they conceived to be the Name. And what was it? '*Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour*'; *Jesus*, humanity; *Christ*, the apex of Revelation, the fulfilment of prophecy, the Anointed Prophet, Priest, and King; *Son of God*, the divine nature: and all these, the humanity, the Messiahship, the divinity, found their sphere of activity in the last name, which, without them, would in its fulness have been impossible—*Saviour*. He is not such a Saviour as He may be to each of us, unless our conception of the Name grasps these three truths: His humanity, His Messiahship, His divinity. 'His Name has made this man strong.'

II. Notice how the power of the Name comes to operate.

Now, if you will observe the language of my text, you will note that Peter says, as it would appear, the same thing twice over: 'His Name, through faith in His Name, hath made this man strong.' And then, as if he were saying something else, he adds what seems to be the same thing: 'Yea! the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness.'

Now, note that in the first of these two statements nothing appears except the 'man,' the 'Name,' and 'faith.' I take it, though of course it may be questionable, that that clause refers to the man's faith, and that we have in it the intentional exclusion of the human workers, and are presented with the only two parties really concerned—at the one end the Name, at the other end 'this man made strong.' And the link of connection between the two in this clause is faith—that is, the man's trust. But then, if we come to the next clause, we find that although Peter has just previously disclaimed all merit in the cure, yet there is a sense in which some one's faith, working as from without, *gave* to the man 'this perfect soundness.' And it seems very natural to me to understand that here, where human faith is represented as being, in some subordinate sense, the bestower of the healing which really the Name had bestowed, it is the faith of the human miracle-worker or medium which is referred to. Peter's faith did give, but Peter only gave what he had received through faith. And so let all the praise be given to the water, and none to the cup.

Whether that be a fair interpretation of the words of my text, with their singular and apparently meaningless tautology or no, at all events the principle which is involved in the explanation is one that I wish to dwell upon briefly now; and that is, that in order for the Name, charged and supercharged with healing and strengthening power as it is, to come into operation, there must be a twofold trust.

The healer, the medium of healing, must have faith in the Name. Yes! of course. In all regions the first requisite, the one indispensable condition, of a successful propagandist, is enthusiastic confidence in what he promulgates. 'That man will go far,' said a cynical politician about one of his rivals; 'he believes every word he says.' And that is the condition always of getting other people to believe us. Faith is contagious; men catch from other people's tongues the accent of conviction. If one wants to enforce any opinion upon others, the first condition is that he shall be utterly self-oblivious; and when he is manifestly saying, as the Apostles in this context did, 'Do not fix your eyes on us, as though we were doing anything,' then hearts will bow before him, as the trees of the wood are bowed by the wind.

If that is true in all regions, it is eminently true in regard to religion. For what we need there most is not to be instructed, but to be impressed. Most of us have, lying dormant in the bedchamber and infirmary of our brains, convictions which only need to be awakened to revolutionise our lives. Now one of the most powerful ways of waking them is contact with any man in whom they are awake. So all successful teachers and messengers of Jesus Christ have had this characteristic in common, however unlike each other they have been. The divergences of temperament, of moods, of point of view, of method of working which prevailed even in the little group of Apostles, and broadly distinguished Paul from Peter, Peter from James, and Paul and Peter and James from John, are only types of what has been repeated ever since. Get together the great missionaries of the Cross, and you would have the most extraordinary collection of miscellaneous idiosyncrasies that the world ever saw, and they would not understand each other, as some of them wofully misunderstood each other when here together. But there was one characteristic in them all, a flaming earnestness of belief in the power of the Name. And so it did not matter much, if at all, what their divergences were. Each of them was fitted for the Master's use.

And so, brethren, here is the reason—I do not say the only reason, but the main one, and that which most affects us—for the slow progress, and even apparent failure, of Christianity. It has fallen into the hands of a Church that does not half believe its own Gospel. By reason of formality and ceremonial and sacerdotalism and a lazy kind of expectation that, somehow or other, the benefits of Christ's love can come to men apart from their own personal faith in Him, the Church has largely ceased to anticipate that great things can be done by its utterance of the Name. And if you have, I do not say ministers, or teachers, or official proclaimers, or Sunday-school teachers, or the like, but I say if you have a *Church*, that is honeycombed with doubt, and from which the strength and flood-tide of faith have in many cases ebbed away, why, it may go on uttering its formal proclamations of the Name till the Day of Judgment, and all that will come of it will be—'The man in whom the devils were, leaped upon them, and overcame them, and said'—as he had a good right to say—'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' You cannot kindle a fire with snowballs. If the town crier goes into a quiet corner of the market-place and rings his bell apologetically, and gives out his message in a whisper, it is small wonder if nobody listens. And that is the way in which too many so-called Christian teachers and communities hold forth the Name, as if begging pardon of the world for being so narrow and old-fashioned as to believe in it still.

And no less necessary is faith on the other side. The recipient must exercise trust. This lame man, no doubt, like the other that Paul looked at in a similar case, had faith to be healed. That was the length of his tether. He believed that he was going to have his legs made strong, and they were made strong accordingly. If he had believed more, he would have got more. Let us hope that he did get more, because he believed more, at a later day. But in the meantime the Apostles' faith was not enough to cure him; and it is not enough for you that Jesus Christ should be standing with all His power at your elbow, and that, earnestly and enthusiastically, some of Christ's messengers may press upon you the acceptance of Him as a Saviour. He is of no good in the world to you, and never will be, unless you have the personal faith that knits you to Him.

It cannot be otherwise. Depend upon it, if Jesus Christ could save every one without terms and conditions at all, He would be only too glad to do it. But it cannot be done. The nature of His work, and the sort of blessings that He brings by His work, are such as that it is an impossibility that any man should receive them unless he has that trust which, beginning with the acceptance by the understanding of Christ as Saviour, passes on to the assent of the will, and the outgoing of the heart, and the yielding of the whole nature to Him. How can a truth do any good to any one who does not believe in it? How is it possible that, if you do not take a medicine, it will work? How can you expect to see, unless you open your eyes? How do you propose to have your blood purified, if you do not fill your lungs with air? Is it of any use to have gas-fittings in your house, if they are not connected with the main? Will a water tap run in your sculleries, if there is no pipe that joins it with the source of supply? My dear friend, these rough illustrations are only approximations to the absolute impossibility that Christ can help, heal, or save any man without the man's personal faith. 'Whosoever believeth' is no arbitrary limitation, but is inseparable from the very nature of the salvation given.

III. And now, lastly, note the effects of the power of the Name.

The Apostle puts in two separate clauses what, in the case in hand, was really one thing—'hath made this man strong,' and 'hath given him perfect soundness.' Ah! we can part the two, cannot we? There is the disease, the disease of an alienated heart, of a perverted will, of a swollen self, all of which we need to have cured and checked before we can do right. And there is weakness, the impotence to do what is good, 'how to perform I find not,' and we need to be strengthened as well as cured. There is only one thing that will do these two, and that is that Christ's power, ay, and Christ's own life, should pass, as it will pass if we trust Him, into our foulness and precipitate all the impurity—into our weakness and infuse strength. 'A reed shaken with the wind,' and without substance or solidity to resist, may be placed in what is called a petrifying well, and, by the infiltration of stony substance into its structure, may be turned into a rigid mass, like a little bar of iron. So, if Christ comes into my poor, weak, tremulous nature, there will be an infiltration into the very substance of my being of a present power which will make me strong.

My brother, you and I need, first and foremost, the healing, and then the strength-giving power, which we never find in its completeness anywhere but in Christ, and which we shall always find in Him.

And now notice, Jesus Christ does not make half cures—'this *perfect* soundness.' If any man, in contact with Him, is but half delivered from his infirmities and purged from his sins, it is not because Christ's power is inadequate, but because his own faith is defective.

Christ's cures should be visible to all around. A man's own testimony is not the most satisfactory. Peter appeals to the bystanders. 'You have seen him lying here for years, a motionless lump of mendicancy, at the Temple gate. Now you see him walking and leaping and praising God. Is it a cure, or is it not?' You professing Christians, would you like to stand that test, to empanel a jury of people that have no sympathy with your religion, in order that they might decide whether you were healed and strengthened or not? It is a good thing for us when the world bears witness that Jesus Christ's power has come into us, and made us what we are.

And so, dear friends, I lay all these thoughts on your hearts. Christ's gift is amply sufficient to deliver us from all evils of weakness, sickness, incapacity: to endue us with all gifts of spiritual and immortal strength. But, while the limit of what Christ gives is His boundless wealth, the limit of what you possess is your faith. The rainfall comes down in the same copiousness on rock and furrow, but it runs off the one, having stimulated no growth and left no blessing, and it sinks into the other and quickens every dormant germ into life which will one day blossom into beauty. We are all of us either rock or soil, and which we are depends on the reality, the firmness, and the force of our faith in Christ. He Himself has laid down the principle on which He bestows His gifts when He says, 'According to thy faith be it unto thee!'

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD

'Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.'—ACTS iii. 26.

So ended Peter's bold address to the wondering crowd gathered in the Temple courts around him, with his companion John and the lame man whom they had healed. A glance at his words will show how extraordinarily outspoken and courageous they are. He charges home on his hearers the guilt of Christ's death, unfalteringly proclaims His Messiahship, bears witness to His Resurrection and Ascension, asserts that He is the End and Fulfilment of ancient revelation, and offers to all the great blessings that Christ brings. And this fiery, tender oration came from the same lips which, a few weeks before, had been blanched with fear before a flippant maidservant, and had quivered as they swore, 'I know not the man!'

One or two simple observations may be made by way of introduction. 'Unto you *first*'—'first' implies second; and so the Apostle has shaken himself clear of the Jews' narrow belief that Messias belonged to them only, and is already beginning to contemplate the possibility of a transference of the kingdom of God to the outlying Gentiles. 'God having raised up His Son'—that expression has no reference, as it might at first seem, to the fact of the Resurrection; but is employed in the same sense as, and indeed looks back to, previous words. For he had just quoted Moses' declaration, 'A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from your brethren.' So it is Christ's equipment and appointment for His office, and not His Resurrection, which is spoken about here. 'His

Son Jesus'—the Revised Version more accurately translates 'His Servant Jesus.' I shall have a word or two to say about that translation presently, but in the meantime I simply note the fact.

With this slight explanation let us now turn to two or three of the aspects of the words before us.

I. First, I note the extraordinary transformation which they indicate in the speaker.

I have already referred to his cowardice a very short time before. That transformation from a coward to a hero he shared in common with his brethren. On one page we read, 'They all forsook Him and fled.' We turn over half a dozen leaves and we read: 'They departed from the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.' What did that?

Then there is another transformation no less swift, sudden, and inexplicable, except on one hypothesis. All through Christ's life the disciples had been singularly slow to apprehend the highest aspects of His teachings, and they had clung with a strange obstinacy to their narrow Pharisaic and Jewish notions of the Messiah as coming to establish a temporal dominion, in which Israel was to ride upon the necks of the subject nations. And now, all at once, this Apostle, and his fellows with him, have stepped from these puerile and narrow ideas out into this large place, that he and they recognise that the Jew had no exclusive possession of Messiah's blessings, and that these blessings consisted in no external kingdom, but lay mainly and primarily in His 'turning every one of you from your iniquities.' At one time the Apostles stood upon a gross, low, carnal level, and in a few weeks they were, at all events, feeling their way to, and to a large extent had possession of, the most spiritual and lofty aspects of Christ's mission. What did that?

Something had come in between which wrought more, in a short space, than all the three years of Christ's teaching and companionship had done for them. What was it? Why did they not continue in the mood which two of them are reported to have been in, after the Crucifixion, when they said—'It is all up! we trusted that this had been He,' but the force of circumstances has shivered the confidence into fragments, and there is no such hope left for us any longer. What brought them out of that Slough of Despond?

I would put it to any fair-minded man whether the psychological facts of this sudden maturing of these childish minds, and their sudden change from slinking cowards into heroes who did not blanch before the torture and the scaffold, are accountable, if you strike out the Resurrection, the Ascension, and Pentecost? It seems to me that, for the sake of avoiding a miracle, the disbelievers in the Resurrection accept an impossibility, and tie themselves to an intellectual absurdity. And I for one would rather believe in a miracle than believe in an uncaused change, in which the Apostles take exactly the opposite course from that which they necessarily must have taken, if there had not been the facts that the New Testament asserts that there were, Christ's rising again from the dead, and Ascension.

Why did not the Church share the fate of John's disciples, who scattered like sheep without a shepherd when Herod chopped off their master's head? Why did not the Church share the fate of that abortive rising, of which we know that when Theudas, its leader, was slain, 'all, as many as believed on him, came to nought.' Why did these men act in exactly the opposite way? I take it that, as you cannot account for Christ except on the hypothesis that He is the Son of the Highest, you cannot account for the continuance of the Christian Church for a week after the Crucifixion, except on the hypothesis that the men who composed it were witnesses of His Resurrection, and saw Him floating upwards and received into the Shechinah cloud and lost to their sight. Peter's change, witnessed by the words of my text—these bold and clear-sighted words—seems to me to be a perfect monstrosity, and incapable of explication, unless he saw the risen Lord, beheld the ascended Christ, was touched with the fiery Spirit descending on Pentecost, and so 'out of weakness was made strong,' and from a babe sprang to the stature of a man in Christ.

II. Look at these words as setting forth a remarkable view of Christ.

I have already referred to the fact that the word rendered 'son' ought rather to be rendered 'servant.' It literally means 'child' or 'boy,' and appears to have been used familiarly, just in the same fashion as we use the same expression 'boy,' or its equivalent 'maid,' as a more gentle designation for a servant. Thus the kindly centurion, when he would bespeak our Lord's care for his menial, calls him his 'boy'; and our Bible there translates rightly 'servant.'

Again, the designation is that which is continually employed in the Greek translation of the Old Testament as the equivalent for the well-known prophetic phrase 'the Servant of Jehovah,' which, as you will remember, is characteristic of the second portion of the prophecies of Isaiah. And consequently we find that, in a quotation of Isaiah's prophecy in the Gospel of Matthew, the very phrase of our text is there employed: 'Behold My Servant whom I uphold!'

Now, it seems as if this designation of our Lord as God's Servant was very familiar to Peter's thoughts at this stage of the development of Christian doctrine. For we find the name employed twice in this discourse—in the thirteenth verse, 'the God of our Fathers hath glorified His Servant Jesus,' and again in my text. We also find it twice in the next chapter, where Peter, offering up a prayer amongst his brethren, speaks of 'Thy Holy Child Jesus,' and prays 'that signs and wonders may be done through the name' of that 'Holy Child.' So, then, I think we may fairly take it that, at the time in question, this thought of Jesus as the 'Servant of the Lord' had come with especial force to the primitive Church. And the fact that the designation never occurs again in the New Testament seems to show that they passed on from it into a deeper perception than even it attests of who and what this Jesus was in relation to God.

But, at all events, we have in our text the Apostle looking back to that dim, mysterious Figure which rises up with shadowy lineaments out of the great prophecy of 'Isaiah,' and thrilling with awe and wonder, as he sees, bit by bit, in the Face painted on the prophetic canvas, the likeness of the Face into which he had looked for three blessed years, that now began to tell him more than they had done whilst their moments were passing.

'The Servant of the Lord'—that means, first of all, that Christ, in all which He does, meekly and obediently executes the Father's will. As He Himself said, 'I come not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me.' But it carries us further than that, to a point about which I would like to say one word now; and that is, the clear recognition that the very centre of Jewish prophecy is the revelation of the personality of the Christ. Now, it seems to me that present tendencies, discussions about the nature and limits of inspiration, investigations which, in many directions, are to be welcomed and are fruitful as to the manner of origin of the books of the Old Testament, and as to their collection into a Canon and a whole—that all this new light has a counterbalancing disadvantage, in that it tends somewhat to obscure in men's minds the great central truth about the revelation of God in Israel—viz. that it was all progressive, and that its goal and end was Jesus Christ. 'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,' and however much we may have to learn—and I have no doubt that we have a great deal to learn, about the composition, the structure, the authorship, the date of these ancient books—I take leave to say that the unlearned reader, who recognises that they all converge on Jesus Christ, has hold of the clue of the labyrinth, and has come nearer to the marrow of the books than the most learned investigators, who see all manner of things besides in them, and do not see that 'they that went before cried, saying, Hosanna! Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord!'

And so I venture to commend to you, brethren—not as a barrier against any reverent investigation, not as stopping any careful study—this as the central truth concerning the ancient revelation, that it had, for its chief business, to proclaim the coming of the Servant of Jehovah, Jesus the Christ.

III. And now, lastly, look at these words as setting forth the true centre of Christ's work.

'He has sent Him to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.' I have already spoken about the gross, narrow, carnal apprehensions of Messiah's work which cleaved to the disciples during all our Lord's life here, and which disturbed even the sanctity of the upper chamber at that last meal, with squabbles about precedence which had an eye to places in the court of the Messiah when He assumed His throne. But here Peter has shaken himself clear of all these, and has grasped the thought that, whatever derivative and secondary blessings of an external and visible sort may, and must, come in Messiah's train, *the* blessing which He brings is of a purely spiritual and inward character, and consists in turning away single souls from their love and practice of evil. That is Christ's true work.

The Apostle does not enlarge as to how it is done. We know how it is done. Jesus turns away men from sin because, by the magnetism of His love, and the attractive raying out of influence from His Cross, He turns them to Himself. He turns us from our iniquities by the expulsive power of a new affection, which, coming into our hearts like a great river into some foul Augean stable, sweeps out on its waters all the filth that no broom can ever clear out in detail. He turns men from their iniquities by His gift of a new life, kindred with that from which it is derived.

There is an old superstition that lightning turned whatever it struck towards the point from which the flash came, so that a tree with its thousand leaves had each of them pointed to that quarter in the heavens where the blaze had been.

And so Christ, when He flings out the beneficent flash that slays only our evil, and vitalises ourselves, turns us to Him, and away from our transgressions. 'Turn us, O Christ, and we shall be turned.'

Ah, brethren! that is the blessing that we need most, for 'iniquities' are universal; and so long as man is bound to his sin it will embitter all sweetnesses, and neutralise every blessing. It is not culture, valuable as that is in many ways, that will avail to stanch man's deepest wounds. It is not a new social order that will still the discontent and the misery of humanity. You may adopt collective economic and social arrangements, and divide property out as it pleases you. But as long as man continues selfish he will continue sinful, and as long as he continues sinful *any* social order will be pregnant with sorrow, 'and when it is finished it will bring forth death.' You have to go deeper down than all that, down as deep as this Apostle goes in this sermon of his, and recognise that Christ's prime blessing is the turning of men from their iniquities, and that only after that has been done will other good come.

How shallow, by the side of that conception, do modern notions of Jesus as the great social Reformer look! These are true, but they want their basis, and their basis lies only here, that He is the Redeemer of individuals from their sins. There were people in Christ's lifetime who were all untouched by His teachings, but when they found that He gave bread miraculously they said, 'This is of a truth the Prophet! That's the prophet for my money; the Man that can make bread, and secure material well-being.' Have not certain modern views of Christ's work and mission a good deal in common with these vulgar old Jews—views which regard Him mainly as contributing to the material good, the social and economical well-being of the world?

Now, I believe that He does that. And I believe that

Christ's principles are going to revolutionise society as it exists at present. But I am sure that we are on a false scent if we attempt to preach consequences without proclaiming their antecedents, and that such preaching will end, as all such attempts have ended, in confusion and disappointment.

They used to talk about Jesus Christ, in the first French Revolution, as 'the Good *Sansculotte*.' Perfectly true! But as the basis of that, and of all representations of Him, that will have power on the diseases of the community, we have to preach Him as the Saviour of the individual from his sin.

And so, brethren, has He saved you? Do you begin your notions of Jesus Christ where His work begins? Do you feel that what you want most is neither culture nor any superficial and external changes, but something that will deal with the deep, indwelling, rooted, obstinate self-regard which is the centre of all sin? And have you gone alone to Him as a sinful man? As the Apostle here suggests, Jesus Christ does not save communities. The doctor has his patients into the consulting-room one by one. There is no applying of Christ's benefits to men in batches, by platoons and regiments, as Clovis baptized his Franks; but you have to go, every one of you, through the turnstile singly, and alone to confess, and alone to be absolved, and alone to be turned, from your iniquity.

If I might venture to alter the position of words in my text, I would lay them, so modified, on the hearts of all my friends whom my words may reach now, and say, 'Unto you—*unto thee*, God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, *first* in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.'

THE FIRST BLAST OF TEMPEST

'And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, 2. Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now even-tide. 4. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. 5. And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, 6. And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? 8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10. Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. 11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. 13. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. 14. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.'—ACTS iv. 1-14.

HITHERTO the Jewish authorities had let the disciples alone, either because their attention had not been drawn even by Pentecost and the consequent growth of the Church, or because they thought that to ignore the new sect was the best way to end it. But when its leaders took to vehement preaching in Solomon's porch, and crowds eagerly listened, it was time to strike in.

Our passage describes the first collision of hostile authority with Christian faith, and shows, as in a glass, the constant result of that collision in all ages.

The motives actuating the assailants are significantly analysed, and may be distributed among the three classes enumerated. The priests and the captain of the Temple would be annoyed by the very fact that Peter and John taught the people: the former, because they were jealous of their official prerogative: the latter, because he was responsible for public order, and a riot in the Temple court would have been a scandal. The Sadducees were indignant at the substance of the teaching, which affirmed the resurrection of the dead, which they denied, and alleged it as having occurred 'in Jesus.'

The position of Sadducees and Pharisees is inverted in Acts as compared with the Gospels. While Christ lived, the Pharisees were the soul of the opposition to Him, and His most solemn warnings fell on them; after the Resurrection, the Sadducees head the opposition, and among the Pharisees are some, like Gamaliel and afterwards Paul, who incline to the new faith. It was the Resurrection that made the difference, and the difference is an incidental testimony to the fact that Christ's Resurrection was proclaimed from the first. To ask whether Jesus had risen, and to examine the evidence, were the last things of which the combined assailants thought. This public activity of the Apostles threatened their influence or their pet beliefs, and so, like persecutors in all ages, they shut their eyes to the important question, 'Is this preaching true or false?' and took the easier course of laying hands on the preachers.

So the night fell on Peter and John in prison, the first of the thousands who have suffered bonds and imprisonment for Christ, and have therein found liberty. What lofty faith, and what subordination of the fate of the messengers to the progress of the message, are expressed in that abrupt introduction, in verse 4, of the statistics of the increase of the Church from that day's work! It mattered little that it ended with the two Apostles in custody, since it ended too with five thousand rejoicing in Christ.

The arrest seems to have been due to a sudden thought on the part of the priests, captain, and Sadducees, without commands from the Sanhedrin or the high priest. But when these inferior authorities had got hold of their prisoners, they probably did not quite know what to do with them, and so moved the proper persons to summon the Sanhedrin. In all haste, then, a session was called for next morning. 'Rulers, elders, and scribes' made up the constituent members of the court, and the same two 'high priests' who had tried Jesus are there, attended by a strong contingent of dependants, who could be trusted to vote as they were bidden. Annas was an *emeritus* high priest, whose age and relationship to Caiaphas, the actual holder of the post and Annas's son-in-law, gave him an influential position. He retained the title, though he had ceased to hold the office, as a cleric without a charge is usually called 'Reverend.'

It was substantially the same court which had condemned Jesus, and probably now sat in the same hall as then. So that Peter and John would remember the last time when they had together been in that room, and Who had stood in the criminal's place where they now were set.

The court seems to have been somewhat at a loss how to proceed. The Apostles had been arrested for their words, but they are questioned about the miracle. It was no crime to teach in the Temple, but a crime might be twisted out of working a miracle in the name of any but Jehovah. To do that would come near blasphemy or worshipping strange gods. The Sanhedrin knew what the answer to their question would be, and probably they intended, as soon as the anticipated answer was given, to 'rend their clothes,' and say, as they had done once before, 'What need we further witnesses?

They have spoken blasphemy.' But things did not go as was expected. The crafty question was put. It does not attempt to throw doubt on the reality of the miracle, but there is a world of arrogant contempt in it, both in speaking of the cure as 'this,' and in the scornful emphasis with which, in the Greek, 'ye' stands last in the sentence, and implies, 'ye poor, ignorant fishermen.'

The last time that Peter had been in the judgment-hall his courage had oozed out of him at the prick of a maid-servant's sharp tongue, but now he fronts all the ecclesiastical authorities without a tremor. Whence came the transformation of the cowardly denier into the heroic confessor, who turns the tables on his judges and accuses them? The narrative answers. He was 'filled with the Holy Ghost.' That abiding possession of the Spirit, begun on Pentecost, did not prevent special inspiration for special needs, and the Greek indicates that there was granted such a temporary influx in this critical hour.

One cannot but note the calmness of the Apostle, so unlike his old tumultuous self. He begins with acknowledging the lawful authority of the court, and goes on, with just a tinge of sarcasm, to put the vague 'this' of the question in its true light. It was 'a good deed done to an impotent man,' for which John and he stood there. Singular sort of crime that! Was there not a presumption that the power which had wrought so 'good' a deed was good? 'Do men gather grapes of thorns?' Many a time since then Christianity has been treated as criminal, because of its beneficence to bodies and souls.

But Peter rises to the full height of the occasion, when he answers the Sanhedrin's question with the pealing forth of his Lord's name. He repeats in substance his former contrast of Israel's treatment of Jesus and God's; but, in speaking to the rulers, his tone is more severe than it was to the people. The latter had been charged, at Pentecost and in the Temple, with crucifying *Jesus*; the former are here charged with crucifying the *Christ.* It was their business to have tested his claims, and to have welcomed the Messiah. The guilt was shared by both, but the heavier part lay on the shoulders of the Sanhedrin.

Mark, too, the bold proclamation of the Resurrection, the stone of offence to the Sadducees. How easy it would have been for them to silence the Apostle, if they could have pointed to the undisturbed and occupied grave! That would have finished the new sect at once. Is there any reason why it was not done but the one reason that it could not be done?

Thus far Peter has been answering the interrogation legally put, and has done as was anticipated. Now was the time for Annas and the rest to strike in; but they could not carry out their programme, for the fiery stream of Peter's words does not stop when they expected, and instead of a timid answer followed by silence, they get an almost defiant proclamation of the Name, followed by a charge against them, which turns the accused into the accuser, and puts them at the bar. Peter learned to apply the passage in the Psalm (v. 11) to the rulers, from his Master's use of it (Matt. xxi. 42); and there is no quaver in his voice nor fear in his heart when, in the face of all these learned Rabbis and high and mighty dignitaries, he brands them as foolish builders, blind to the worth of the Stone 'chosen of God, and precious,' and tells them that the course of divine Providence will run counter to their rejection of Jesus, and make him the very 'Head of the corner,'—the crown, as well as the foundation, of God's building.

But not even this bold indictment ends the stream of his speech. The proclamation of the power of the Name was fitly followed by pressing home the guilt and madness of rejecting Jesus, and that again by the glad tidings of salvation for all, even the rejecters. Is not the sequence in Peter's defence substantially that which all Christian preaching should exhibit? First, strong, plain proclamation of the truth; then pungent pressing home of the sin of turning away from Jesus; and then earnest setting forth of the salvation in His name,—a salvation wide as the world, and deep as our misery and need, but narrow, inasmuch as it is 'in none other.' The Apostle will not end with charging his hearers with guilt, but with offering them salvation. He will end with lifting up 'the Name' high above all other, and setting it in solitary clearness before, not these rulers only, but the whole world. The salvation which it had wrought on the lame man was but a parable and picture of the salvation from all ills of body and spirit, which was stored in that Name, and in it alone.

The rulers' contempt had been expressed by their emphatic ending of their question with that 'ye.' Peter expresses his brotherhood and longing for the good of his judges by ending his impassioned, or, rather, inspired address with a loving, pleading 'we.' He puts himself on the same level with them as needing salvation, and would fain have them on the same level with himself and John as receiving it. That is the right way to preach.

Little need be said as to the effect of this address.

Whether it went any deeper in any susceptible souls or not, it upset the schemes of the leaders. Something in the manner and matter of it awed them into wonder, and paralysed them for the time. Here was the first instance of the fulfilment of that promise, which has been fulfilled again and again since, of 'a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.' 'Unlearned,' as ignorant of Rabbinical traditions, and 'ignorant,' or, rather, 'private,' as holding no official position, these two wielded a power over hearts and consciences which not even official indifference and arrogance could shake off. Thank God, that day's experience is repeated still, and any of us may have the same Spirit to clothe us with the same armour of light!

The Sanhedrin knew well enough that the Apostles had been with Jesus, and the statement that 'they took knowledge of them' cannot mean that that fact dawned on the rulers for the first time. Rather it means that their wonder at the 'boldness' of the two drove home the fact of their association with Him to their minds. That association explained the marvel; for the Sanhedrin remembered how He had stood, meek but unawed, at the same bar. They said to themselves, 'We know where these men get this brave freedom of speech,—from that Nazarene.' Happy shall we be if our demeanour recalls to spectators the ways of our Lord!

How came the lame man there? He had not been arrested with the Apostles. Had he voluntarily and bravely joined them? We do not know, but evidently he was not there as accused, and probably had come as a witness of the reality of the miracle. Notice the emphatic 'standing,' as in verse 10,—a thing that he had never done all his life. No wonder that the Sanhedrin were puzzled, and settled down to the 'lame and impotent conclusion' which follows. So, in the first round of the world-long battle between the persecutors and the persecuted, the victory is all on the side of the latter. So it has been ever since, though often the victors have died in the conflict. 'The Church is an anvil which has worn out many hammers,' and the story of the first collision is, in essentials, the story of all.

WITH AND LIKE CHRIST

'Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.'—ACTS iv. 13.

TWO young Galilean fishermen, before the same formidable tribunal which a few weeks before had condemned their Master, might well have quailed. And evidently 'Annas, the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest,' were very much astonished that their united wisdom and dignity did not produce a greater impression on these two contumacious prisoners. They were 'unlearned,' knowing nothing about Rabbinical wisdom; they were 'ignorant,' or, as the word ought rather to be rendered, 'persons in a private station,' without any kind of official dignity. And yet there they stood, perfectly unembarrassed and at their ease, and said what they wanted to say, all of it, right out. So, as great astonishment crept over the dignified ecclesiastics who were sitting in judgment upon them, their astonishment led them to remember what, of course, they knew before, only that it had not struck them so forcibly, as explaining the Apostles' demeanour—viz., 'that they had been with Jesus.' So they said to themselves: 'Ah, that explains it all! There is the root of it. The company that they have kept accounts for their unembarrassed boldness.'

Now, I need not notice by more than a word in passing, what a testimony it is to the impression that that meek and gracious Sufferer had made upon His judges, that when they saw these two men standing there unfaltering, they began to remember how that other Prisoner had stood. And perhaps some of them began to think that they had made a mistake in that last trial. It is a testimony to the impression that Christ had made that the strange demeanour of His two servants recalled the Master to the mind of the judges.

I. The first thing that strikes us here is the companionship that transforms.

The rulers were partly right, and they were partly wrong. The source from which these men had drawn their boldness was their being with Christ; but it was not such companionship with Christ, as Annas and Caiaphas had in view, that had given them courage. For as long as the Apostles had His personal presence with them, there was no perceptible transforming or elevating process going on in them; and it was not until after they had lost that corporeal presence that there came upon them the change which even the prejudiced eyes of these judges could not help seeing.

The writer of Acts gives a truer explanation with which we may fill out the incomplete explanation of the rulers, when he says, 'Then Peter, *filled with the Holy Ghost*, said unto them.' Ah, that is it! They had been with Jesus all the days that He went in and out amongst them. They had companioned with Him, and they had gained but little from it. But when He went away, and they were relegated to the same kind of companionship with Him that you and I have or may have, then a change began to take place on them. And so the companionship that transforms is not what the Apostle calls 'knowing Christ after the flesh,' but inward communion with Him, the companionship and familiarity which are as possible for us as for any Peter or John of them all, and without which our Christianity is nothing but sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

They were 'with Jesus,' as each of us may be. Their communion was in no respect different from the communion that is open and indispensable to any real Christian. To be with Him is possible for us all. When we go to our daily work, when we are compassed about by distracting and trivial cares, when men come buzzing round us, and the ordinary secularities of life seem to close in upon us like the walls of a prison, and to shut out the blue and the light —oh! it is hard, but it *is* possible, for every one of us to think these all away, and to carry with us into everything that blessed thought of a Presence that is not to be put aside, that sits beside me at my study table, that stands beside you at your tasks, that goes with you in shop and mart, that is always near, with its tender encircling, with its mighty protection, with its all-sufficing sweetness and power. To be with Christ is no prerogative, either of Apostles and teachers of the primitive age, or of saints that have passed into the higher vision; but it is possible for us all. No doubt there are as yet unknown forms and degrees of companionship with Christ in the future state, in comparison with which to be 'present in the body is to be absent from the Lord'; but in the inmost depth of reality, the soul that loves is where it loves, and has whom it loves ever with it. 'Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also,' and we may be with Christ if only we will honestly try hour by hour to keep ourselves in touch with Him, and to make Him the motive as well as the end of the work that other men do along with us, and do from altogether secular and low motives.

Another phase of being with Christ lies in frank, full, and familiar conversation with Him. I do not understand a dumb companionship. When we are with those that we love, and with whom we are at ease, speech comes instinctively. If we are co-denizens of the Father's house with the Elder Brother, we shall talk to Him. We shall not need to be reminded of the 'duty of prayer,' but shall rather instinctively and as a matter of course, without thinking of what we are doing, speak to Him our momentary wants, our passing discomforts, our little troubles. There may be a great deal more virtue in monosyllabic prayers than in long liturgies. Little jets of speech or even of unspoken speech that go up to Him are likely to be heart-felt and to be heard. It is said of Israel's army on one occasion, 'they cried unto God in the battle, and He was entreated of them.' Do you think that theirs would be very elaborate prayers? Was there any time to make a long petition when the sword of a Philistine was whizzing about the suppliant's ears? It was only a cry, but it *was* a cry; and so 'He was entreated of them.' If we are 'with Christ' we shall talk to Him; and if we are with Christ He will talk to us. It is for us to keep in the attitude of listening and, so far as may be, to hush other voices, in order that His may be heard. If we do so, even here 'shall we ever be with the Lord.'

II. Now, note next the character that this companionship produces.

Annas and Caiaphas said to each other: 'Ah, these two have been with that Jesus! That is where they have got their boldness. They are like Him.'

As is the Master, so is the servant. That is the broad, general principle that lies in my text. To be with Christ makes men Christlike. A soul habitually in contact with Jesus will imbibe sweetness from Him, as garments laid away in a drawer with some preservative perfume absorb fragrance from that beside which they lie. Therefore the surest way for Christian people to become what God would have them to be, is to direct the greater part of their effort, not so much to the acquirement of individual characteristics and excellences, as to the keeping up of continuity of communion with the Master. Then the excellences will come. Astronomers, for instance, have found out that if they take a sensitive plate and lay it so as to receive the light from a star, and keep it in place by giving it a motion corresponding with the apparent motion of the heavens, for hours and hours, there will become visible upon it a photographic image of dim stars that no human eye or telescope can see. Persistent lying before the light stamps the image of the light upon the plate. Communion with Christ is the secret of Christlikeness. So instead of all the wearisome, painful, futile attempts at tinkering one's own character apart from Him, here is the royal road. Not that there is no effort in it. We must never forget nor undervalue the necessity for struggle in the

Christian life. But that truth needs to be supplemented with the thought that comes from my text—viz. that the fruitful direction in which the struggle is to be mainly made lies in keeping ourselves in touch with Jesus Christ, and if we do that, then transformation comes by beholding. 'We all, reflecting as a mirror does, the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image.' 'They have been with Jesus,' and so they were like Him.

But now look at the specific kinds of excellence which seem to have come out of this communion. 'They beheld the *boldness* of Peter and John.' The word that is translated 'boldness' no doubt conveys that idea, but it also conveys another. Literally it means 'the act of saying everything.' It means openness of unembarrassed speech, and so comes to have the secondary signification, which the text gives, of 'boldness.'

Then, to be with Christ gives a living knowledge of Him and of truth, far in advance of the head knowledge of wise and learned people. It was a fact that these two knew nothing about what Rabbi *This*, or Rabbi *That*, or Rabbi *The Other* had said, and yet could speak, as they had been speaking, large religious ideas that astonished these hide-bound Pharisees, who thought that there was no way to get to the knowledge of the revelation of God made to Israel, except by the road of their own musty and profitless learning. Ay! and it always is so. An ounce of experience is worth a ton of theology. The men that have summered and wintered with Jesus Christ may not know a great many things that are supposed to be very important parts of religion, but they have got hold of the central truth of it, with a power, and in a fashion, that men of books, and ideas, and systems and creeds and theological learning, may know nothing about. 'Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, are called.' Let a poor man at his plough-tail, or a poor woman in her garret, or a collier in the pit, have Jesus Christ for their Companion, and they have got the kernel; and the gentlemen that like such diet may live on the shell if they will, and can. Religious ideas are of little use unless there be heart-experiences; and heart-experiences are wonderful teachers of religious truth.

Again, to be with Christ frees from the fear of man. It was a new thing for such persons as Peter and John to stand cool and unawed before the Council. Not so very long ago one of the two had been frightened into a momentary apostasy by dread of being haled before the rulers, and now they are calmly heroic, and threats are idle words to them. I need not point to the strong presumption, raised by the contrast of the Apostles' past cowardice and present courage, of the occurrence of some such extraordinary facts as the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Descent of the Spirit. Something had happened which revolutionised these men. It was their communion with Jesus, made more real and deep by the cessation of His bodily presence, which made these unlearned and non-official Galileans front the Council with calmly beating hearts and unfaltering tongues. Doubtless, temperament has much to do with courage, but, no doubt, he who lives near Jesus is set free from undue dependence on things seen and on persons. Perfect love casts out fear, not only of the Beloved, but of all creatures. It is the bravest thing in the world.

Further, to be with Christ will open a man's lips The fountain, if it is full, must well up. 'Light is light which circulates. Heat is heat which radiates.' The true possession of Jesus Christ will always make it impossible for the possessor to be dumb. I pray you to test yourselves, as I would that all professing Christians should test themselves, by that simple truth, that a full heart must find utterance. The instinct that drives a man to speak of the thing in which he is interested should have full play in the Christian life. It seems to me a terribly sad fact that there are such hosts of good, kind people, with some sort of religion about them, who never feel any anxiety to say a word to any soul concerning the Master whom they profess to love. I know, of course, that deep feeling is silent, and that the secrets of Christian experience are not to be worn on the sleeve for daws to peck at. And I know that the conventionalities of this generation frown very largely upon the frank utterance of religious convictions on the part of religious people, except on Sundays, in Sunday-schools, pulpits, and the like. But for all that, what is in you will come out. If you have never felt 'I was weary of forbearing, and I could not stay,' I do not think that there is much sign in you of a very deep or a very real being with Jesus.

III. The last point to be noted is, the impression which such a character makes.

It was not so much what Peter and John said that astonished the Council, as the fact of their being composed and bold enough to say anything.

A great deal more is done by character than by anything else. Most people in the world take their notions of Christianity from its concrete embodiments in professing Christians. For one man that has read his Bible, and has come to know what religion is thereby, there are a hundred that look at you and me, and therefrom draw their conclusions as to what religion is. It is not my sermons, but your life, that is the most important agency for the spread of the Gospel in this congregation. And if we, as Christian people, were to live so as to make men say, 'Dear me, that is strange. That is not the kind of thing that one would have expected from that man. That is of a higher strain than he is of. Where did it come from, I wonder?' 'Ah, he learned it of that Jesus'—if people were constrained to speak in that style to themselves about us, dear friends, and about all our brethren, England would be a different England from what it is to-day. It is Christians' lives, after all, that make dints in the world's conscience.

Do you remember one of the Apostle's lovely and strong metaphors? Paul says that that little Church in Thessalonica rung out clear and strong the name of Jesus Christ—resonant like the clang of a bugle, 'so that we need not to speak anything.' The word that he employs for 'sounded out' is a technical expression for the ringing blast of a trumpet. Very small penny whistles would be a better metaphor for the instruments which the bulk of professing Christians play on.

'Adorn the doctrine of Christ.' And that you may, listen to His own word, which says all I have been trying to say in this sermon: 'Abide in Me. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.'

OBEDIENT DISOBEDIENCE

> 'But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. 21. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. 22. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed. 23. And being let go they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. 24. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: 25. Who by the mouth of Thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? 26. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ. 27. For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28. For to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done. 29. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word, 30. By stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus. 31. And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.'—ACTS iv. 19-31.

THE only chance for persecution to succeed is to smite hard and swiftly. If you cannot strike, do not threaten. Menacing words only give courage. The rulers betrayed their hesitation when the end of their solemn conclave was but to 'straitly threaten'; and less heroic confessors than Peter and John would have disregarded the prohibition as mere wind. None the less the attitude of these two Galilean fishermen is noble and singular, when their previous cowardice is remembered. This first collision with civil authority gives, as has been already noticed, the main lines on which the relations of the Church to hostile powers have proceeded.

I. The heroic refusal of unlawful obedience. We shall probably not do injustice to John if we suppose that Peter was spokesman. If so, the contrast of the tone of his answer with all previously recorded utterances of his is remarkable. Warm-hearted impulsiveness, often wrong-headed and sometimes illogical, had been their mark; but here we have calm, fixed determination, which, as is usually its manner, wastes no words, but in its very brevity impresses the hearers as being immovable. Whence did this man get the power to lay down once for all the foundation principles of the limits of civil obedience, and of the duty of Christian confession? His words take rank with the ever-memorable sayings of thinkers and heroes, from Socrates in his prison telling the Athenians that he loved them, but that he must 'obey God rather than you,' to Luther at Worms with his 'It is neither safe nor right to do anything against conscience. Here I stand; I can do nothing else. God help me! Amen.' Peter's words are the first of a long series.

This first instance of persecution is made the occasion for the clear expression of the great principles which are to guide the Church. The answer falls into two parts, in the first of which the limits of obedience to civil authority are laid down in a perfectly general form to which even the Council are expected to assent, and in the second an irresistible compulsion to speak is boldly alleged as driving the two Apostles to a flat refusal to obey.

It was a daring stroke to appeal to the Council for an endorsement of the principle in verse 19, but the appeal was unanswerable; for this tribunal had no other ostensible reason for existence than to enforce obedience to the law of God, and to Peter's dilemma only one reply was possible. But it rested on a bold assumption, which was calculated to irritate the court; namely, that there was a blank contradiction between their commands and God's, so that to obey the one was to disobey the other. When that parting of the ways is reached, there remains no doubt as to which road a religious man must take.

The limits of civil obedience are clearly drawn. It is a duty, because 'the powers that be are ordained of God,' and obedience to them is obedience to Him. But if they, transcending their sphere, claim obedience which can only be rendered by disobedience to Him who has appointed them, then they are no longer His ministers, and the duty of allegiance falls away. But there must be a plain conflict of commands, and we must take care lest we substitute whims and fancies of our own for the injunctions of God. Peter was not guided by his own conceptions of duty, but by the distinct precept of his Master, which had bid him speak. It is not true that it is the cause which makes the martyr, but it is true that many good men have made themselves martyrs needlessly. This principle is too sharp a weapon to be causelessly drawn and brandished. Only an unmistakable opposition of commandments warrants its use; and then, he has little right to be called Christ's soldier who keeps the sword in the scabbard.

The articulate refusal in verse 20 bases itself on the ground of irrepressible necessity: 'We cannot but speak.' The immediate application was to the facts of Christ's life, death, and glory. The Apostles could not help speaking of these, both because to do so was their commission, and because the knowledge of them and of their importance forbade silence. The truth implied is of wide reach. Whoever has a real, personal experience of Christ's saving power, and has heard and seen Him, will be irresistibly impelled to impart what he has received. Speech is a relief to a full heart. The word, concealed in the prophet's heart, burned there 'like fire in his bones, and he was weary of forbearing.' So it always is with deep conviction. If a man has never felt that he must speak of Christ, he is a very imperfect Christian. The glow of his own heart, the pity for men who know Him not, his Lord's command, all concur to compel speech. The full river cannot be dammed up.

II. The lame and impotent conclusion of the perplexed Council. How plain the path is when only duty is taken as a guide, and how vigorously and decisively a man marches along it! Peter had no hesitation, and his resolved answer comes crashing in a straight course, like a cannon-ball. The Council had a much more ambiguous oracle to consult in order to settle their course, and they hesitate accordingly, and at last do a something which is a nothing. They wanted to trim their sails to catch popular favour, and so they could not do anything thoroughly. To punish or acquit was the only alternative for just judges. But they were not just; and as Jesus had been crucified, not because Pilate thought Him guilty, but to please the people, so His Apostles were let off, not because they were innocent, but for the same reason. When popularity-hunters get on the judicial bench, society must be rotten, and nearing its dissolution. To 'decree unrighteousness by a law' is among the most hideous of crimes. Judges 'willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,' are portents indicative of corruption. We may remark here how the physician's pen takes note of the patient's age, as making his cure more striking, and manifestly miraculous.

III. The Church's answer to the first assault of the world's power. How beautifully natural that is, 'Being let go, they went to their own,' and how large a principle is expressed in the naïve words! The great law of association according to spiritual affinity has much to do in determining relations here. It aggregates men, according to sorts; but its operation is thwarted by other conditions, so that companionship is often misery. But a time comes when it will work unhindered, and men will be united with their like, as the stones on some sea-beaches are laid in rows, according to their size, by the force of the sea. Judas 'went to his own place,' and, in another world, like will draw to like, and prevailing tendencies will be increased by association with those who share them.

The prayer of the Church was probably the inspired outpouring of one voice, and all the people said 'Amen,' and so made it theirs. Whose voice it was which thus put into words the common sentiment we should gladly have known, but need not speculate. The great fact is that the Church answered threats by prayer. It augurs healthy spiritual life when opposition and danger neither make cheeks blanch with fear nor flush with anger. No man there trembled nor thought of vengeance, or of repaying threats with threats. Every man there instinctively turned heavenwards, and flung himself, as it were, into God's arms for protection. Prayer is the strongest weapon that a persecuted Church can use. Browning makes a tyrant say, recounting how he had tried to crush a man, that his intended victim

> 'Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed,
> So *I* was afraid.'

The contents of the prayer are equally noteworthy. Instead of minutely studying it verse by verse, we may note some of its salient points. Observe its undaunted courage. That company never quivered or wavered. They had no thought of obeying the mandate of the Council. They were a little army of heroes. What had made them so? What but the conviction that they had a living Lord at God's right hand, and a mighty Spirit in their spirits? The world has never seen a transformation like that. Unique effects demand unique causes for their explanation, and nothing but the historical truth of the facts recorded in the last pages of the Gospels and first of the Acts accounts for the demeanour of these men.

Their courage is strikingly marked by their petition. All they ask is 'boldness' to speak a word which shall not be theirs, but God's. Fear would have prayed for protection; passion would have asked retribution on enemies. Christian courage and devotion only ask that they may not shrink from their duty, and that the word may be spoken, whatever becomes of the speakers. The world is powerless against men like that. Would the Church of to-day meet threats with like unanimity of desire for boldness in confession? If not, it must be because it has not the same firm hold of the Risen Lord which these first believers had. The truest courage is that which is conscious of its weakness, and yet has no thought of flight, but prays for its own increase.

We may observe, too, the body of belief expressed in the prayer. First it lays hold on the creative omnipotence of God, and thence passes to the recognition of His written revelation. The Church has begun to learn the inmost meaning of the Old Testament, and to find Christ there. David may not have written the second Psalm. Its attribution to him by the Church stands on a different level from Christ's attribution of authorship, as, for instance, of the hundred and tenth Psalm. The prophecy of the Psalm is plainly Messianic, however it may have had a historical occasion in some forgotten revolt against some Davidic king; and, while the particular incidents to which the prayer alludes do not exhaust its far-reaching application, they are rightly regarded as partly fulfilling it. Herod is a 'king of the earth,' Pilate is a 'ruler'; Roman soldiers are Gentiles; Jewish rulers are the representatives of 'the people.' Jesus is 'God's Anointed.' The fact that such an unnatural and daring combination of rebels was predicted in the Psalm bears witness that even that crime at Calvary was foreordained to come to pass, and that God's hand and counsel ruled. Therefore all other opposition, such as now threatened, will turn out to be swayed by that same Mighty Hand, to work out His counsel. Why, then, should the Church fear? If we can see God's hand moving all things, terror is dead for us, and threats are like the whistling of idle wind.

Mark, too, the strong expression of the Church's dependence on God. 'Lord' here is an unusual word, and means 'Master,' while the Church collectively is called 'Thy servants,' or properly, 'slaves.' It is a different word from that of 'servant' (rather than 'child') applied to Jesus in verses 27 and 30. God is the Master, we are His 'slaves,' bound to absolute obedience, unconditional submission, belonging to Him, not to ourselves, and therefore having claims on Him for such care as an owner gives to his slaves or his cattle. He will not let them be maltreated nor starved. He will defend them and feed them; but they must serve him by life, and death if need be. Unquestioning submission and unreserved dependence are our duties

Absolute ownership and unshared responsibility for our well-being belong to Him.

Further, the view of Christ's relationship to God is the same as occurs in other of the early chapters of the Acts. The title of 'Thy holy Servant Jesus dwells on Christ's office, rather than on His nature. Here it puts Him in contrast with David, also called 'Thy servant.' The latter was imperfectly what Jesus was perfectly. His complete realisation of the prophetic picture of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah is emphasised by the adjective 'holy,' implying complete devotion or separation to the service of God, and unsullied, unlimited moral purity. The uniqueness of His relation in this aspect is expressed by the definite article in the original. He is *the* Servant, in a sense and measure all His own. He is further *the* Anointed Messiah. This was the Church's message to Israel and the stay of its own courage, that Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed and perfect Servant of the Lord, who was now in heaven, reigning there. All that this faith involved had not yet become clear to their consciousness, but the Spirit was guiding them step by step into all the truth; and what they saw and heard, not only in the historical facts of which they were the witnesses, but in the teaching of that Spirit, they could not but speak.

The answer came swift as the roll of thunder after lightning. They who ask for courage to do God's will and speak Christ's name have never long to wait for response. The place 'was shaken,' symbol of the effect of faithful witness-bearing, or manifestation of the power which was given in answer to their prayer. 'They were all filled with the Holy Ghost,' who now did not, as before, confer ability to speak with other tongues, but wrought no less worthily in heartening and fitting them to speak 'in their own tongue, wherein they were born,' in bold defiance of unlawful commands.

The statement of the answer repeats the petition verbatim: 'With all boldness they spake the word.' What we desire of spiritual gifts we get, and God moulds His replies so as to remind us of our petitions, and to show by the event that these have reached His ear and guided His giving hand.

IMPOSSIBLE SILENCE

'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'—Acts iv. 20.

THE context tells us that the Jewish Council were surprised, as they well might be, at the boldness of Peter and John, and traced it to their having been with Jesus. But do you remember that they were by no means bold when they were with Jesus, and that the bravery came after what, in ordinary circumstances, would have destroyed any of it in a man? A leader's execution is not a usual recipe for heartening his followers, but it had that effect in this case, and the Peter who was frightened out of all his heroics by a sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued servant-maid, a few weeks after bearded the Council and 'rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name.' It was not Christ's death that did that, and it was not His life that did that. You cannot understand, to use a long word, the 'psychological' transformation of these cowardly deniers who fled and forsook Him, unless you bring in three things: Resurrection, Ascension, Pentecost. Then it is explicable.

However the boldness came; these two men before the Council were making an epoch at that moment, and their grand words are the Magna Charta of the right of every sincere conviction to free speech. They are the direct parent of hundreds of similar sayings that flash out down the world's history. Two things Peter and John adduced as making silence impossible—a definite divine command, and an inward impulse. 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'

But I wish to use these words now in a somewhat wider application. They may suggest that there are great facts which make silence and non-aggressiveness an impossibility for an individual or a Church, and that by the very law of its being, a Church must be a missionary Church, and a Christian cannot be a dumb Christian, unless he is a dead Christian. And so I turn to look at these words as suggesting to us two or three of the grounds on which Christian effort, in some form or another, is inseparable from Christian experience.

And, first, I wish you to notice that there is—

I. An inward necessity which makes silence impossible.

'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard,' is a principle that applies far more widely than to the work of a Christian Church, or to any activity that is put in force to spread the name of Jesus Christ. For there is a universal impulse which brings it about that whatever, in the nature of profound conviction, of illuminating truth, especially as affecting moral and spiritual matters, is granted to any man, knocks at the inner side of the door of his lips, and demands an exit and free air and utterance.

As surely as the tender green spikelet of the springing corn pushes its way through the hard clods, or as the bud in the fig-tree's polished stem swells and opens, so surely whatever a man, in his deepest heart, knows to be true, calls upon him to let it out and manifest itself in his words and in his life. 'We believe, and therefore speak,' is a universal sequence. There were four leprous men long ago that, in their despair, made their way into the camp of the beleaguering enemy, found it empty; and after they feasted themselves—and small blame to them—then flashed upon them the thought, 'We do not well, this is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning light, some evil will befall us.' Something like that is the uniform accompaniment of all profound conviction. And if so, especially imperative and urgent will this necessity be, wherever there is true Christian life. For whether we consider the greatness of the gift that is imparted to us, in the very act of our receiving that Lord, or whether we consider the soreness of the need of a world that is without Him, surely there can be nothing that so reinforces the natural necessity and impulse to impart what we possess of truth or beauty or goodness as the greatness of the unspeakable gift, and the wretchedness of a world that wants it. Brethren, there are many things that come in the way—and perhaps never more than in our own generation—of Christian men and women making direct and specific efforts, by lip as well as by life, to speak about Jesus Christ to other people. There is the standing hindrance of love of ease and selfish absorption in our own concerns. There are the conventional hindrances of our canons of social intercourse which make it 'bad form' to speak to men about anything beneath the surface, and God forbid that I should urge any man to a brusque, and indiscriminate, and unwise forcing of his faith upon other people. But I believe, that deep down below all these reasons, there are two main reasons why the practice of the clear utterance of their faith on the part of Christian people is so rare. The one is a deficient conception of what the Gospel is, and the other is a feeble grasp of it for ourselves. If you do not think that you have very much to say, you will not be very anxious to say it; and if your notion of Christianity, and of Christ's relation to the world, is that of the superficial professing Christian, then of course you will be smitten with no earnestness of desire to impart the truth to others. Types of Christianity which enfeeble or obscure the central thought of Christ's work for the salvation of a world that needs a Saviour, and is perishing without Him, never were, never are, never will be, missionary or aggressive. There is no driving force in them. They have little to say, and naturally they are in no hurry to say it. But there is a deeper reason than that. I said a minute ago that a dumb Christian was an impossibility unless he were a dead Christian. And *there* is the reason why so many of us feel so little, so very little, of that knocking at the door of our hearts, and saying, 'Let me out!' which we should feel if we deeply believed, and felt, as well as intellectually accepted, the gospel of our salvation.

The cause of a silent Church is a defective conception of the Gospel entrusted to it, or a feeble grasp of the same. And as our silence or indifference is the symptom, so by reaction it is in its turn the cause of a greater enfeeblement of our faith, and of a weaker grasp of the Gospel. Of course I know that it is perfectly possible for a man to talk away his convictions, and I am afraid that that temptation which besets all men of my profession, is not always resisted by us as it ought to be. But, on the other hand, sure am I that no better way can be devised of deepening my own hold of the truths of Christianity than an honest, right attempt to make another share my morsel with me. Convictions bottled, like other things bottled up, are apt to evaporate and to spoil. They say that sometimes wine-growers, when they go down into their cellars, find in a puncheon no wine, but a huge fungus. That is what befalls the Christianity of people that never let air in, and never speak their faith out. 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard'; and if we do not speak, the vision fades and the sound becomes faint.

Now there is another side to this same inward necessity of which I have been speaking, on which I must just touch. I have referred to the impulse which flows from the possession of the Gospel. There is an impulse which flows from that which is but another way of putting the same thing, the union with Jesus Christ, which is the result of our faith in the Gospel. If I am a Christian I am, in a very profound and real sense, one with Jesus Christ, and have His Spirit for the life of my spirit. And in the measure in which I am thus one with Him, I shall look at things as He looks at them, and do such things as He did. If the mind of Jesus Christ is in us 'Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross,' who 'counted not equality with God a thing to be desired, but made Himself of no reputation,' and 'was found in fashion as a man,' then we too shall feel that our work in the world is not done, and our obligations to Him are not discharged, unless to the very last particle of our power we spread His name. Brethren, if there were no commandment at all from Christ's lips laying upon His followers the specific duty of making His gospel known, still this inward impulse of which I am speaking would have created all the forms of Christian aggressiveness which we see round about us, because, if we have Christ and His Gospel in our hearts, 'we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'

And now turn to another aspect of this matter. There is—

II. A command which makes silence criminal.

I do not need to do more than remind you of the fact that the very last words which our Lord has left us according to the two versions of them which are given in the Gospel of Matthew, and the beginning of this Book of the Acts, coincide in this. 'You are to be My witnesses to the ends of the earth. Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.' Did you ever think what an extraordinary thing it is that that confident anticipation of a worldwide dominion, and of being Himself adapted to all mankind, in every climate and in every age, and at every stage of culture, should have been the conviction which the departing Christ sought to stamp upon the minds of those eleven poor men? What audacity! What tremendous confidence! What a task to which to set them! What an unexampled belief in Himself and His work! And it is all coming true; for the world is finding out, more and more, that Jesus Christ is its Saviour and its King.

This commandment which is laid upon us Christian men submerges all distinctions of race, and speech, and nationality, and culture. There are high walls parting men off from one another. This great message and commission, like some rising tide, rolls over them all, and obliterates them, and flows boundless, having drowned the differences, from horizon to horizon, east and west and south and north.

Now let me press the thought that this commandment makes indifference and silence criminal. We hear people talk, people whose Christianity it is not for me to question, though I may question two things about it, its clearness and its depth—we hear them talk as if to help or not to help, in the various forms of Christian activity, missionary or otherwise, was a matter left to their own inclination. No! it is not. Let us distinctly understand that to help or not to help is not the choice open to any man who would obey Jesus Christ. Let us distinctly understand—and God grant that we may all feel it more—that we dare not stand aside, be negligent, do nothing, leave other people to give and to toil, and say, 'Oh! my sympathies do not go in that direction.' Jesus Christ told you that they were to go in that direction, and if they do not, so much the worse for the sympathies for one thing, and so much the worse for you, the rebel, the disobedient in heart. I do not want to bring down this great gift and token of love which Jesus Christ has given to His servants, in entrusting them with the spread of the Gospel, to the low level of a mere commandment, but I do sometimes think that the tone of feeling, ay! and of speech, and still more the manner of action, among professing Christian people, in regard to the whole subject of the missionary work of God's Church, shows that they need to be reminded; as the Duke of Wellington said, 'There are your marching orders!' and the soldier who does not obey his marching orders is a mutineer. There is a definite commandment which makes indifference criminal.

There is another thing I should like to say, viz. that this definite commandment overrides everything else. We hear a great deal from unsympathetic critics, which is but a reproduction of an old grumble that did not come from a very creditable source. 'To what purpose is this waste?' Why do you not spend your money upon technical schools, soup-kitchens, housing of the poor, and the like? Well, our answer is, 'He told us.' We hear, too, especially just in these days, a great deal about the necessity for increased caution in pursuing missionary operations in heathen lands. And some people that do not know anything about the subject have ventured to say, for instance, that the missionaries are responsible for Chinese antagonism to Europeans, and for similar phenomena. Well, we are ready to be as wise and prudent as you like. We do not ask any consuls to help us. Our brethren are men who have hazarded their lives; and I never heard of a Baptist missionary running under the skirts of an ambassador, or praying the government to come and protect him. We do not ask for cathedrals to be built, or territory to be ceded, as compensation for the loss of precious lives. But if these advisers of caution mean no more than they say, 'Caution!' we agree. But if they mean, what some of them mean, that we are to be silent for fear of consequences, then, whether it be prime ministers, or magistrates, or mobs that say it, our answer is, 'Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye! We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.'

So, lastly, there is—

III. The bond of brotherhood which makes silence unnatural.

I have spoken of an inward impulse. That thought turns our attention to our own hearts. I have spoken of a definite command; that turns our eyes to the Throne. I speak now of a bond of brotherhood. That sends our thoughts out over the whole world. There is such a bond. Jesus Christ by His Incarnation has taken the nature of every man upon Himself, and has brought all men into one. Jesus Christ 'by the grace of God, has tasted death for every man,' and has brought all men into unity. And so the much-abused and vulgarised conception of 'fraternity,' and even the very word 'humanity,' are the creation of Christianity, and flow from these two facts—the Cradle of Bethlehem and the Cross of Calvary, besides that prior one that 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men.' If that be so, then what flows from that unity, from that brotherhood thus sacredly founded upon the facts of the life and death of Jesus Christ, the world's Redeemer? This to begin with, that Christian men are bound to look out over humanity with Christ's eyes, and not—as is largely the case to-day—to regard other nations as enemies and rivals, and the 'lower races' as existing to be exploited for our wealth, to be coerced for our glory, to be conquered for our Empire. We have to think of them as Jesus Christ thought. I cannot but remember days in England when the humanitarian sentiment in regard to the inferior races was far more vigorous, and far more operative in national life than it is to-day. I can go back in boyhood's memory to the emancipation of the West Indian slaves, and that was but the type of the general tendency of thought amongst the better minds of England in those days. Would that it were so now!

But further, brethren, we as Christian people have laid upon us this responsibility by that very bond of brotherhood, that we should carry whithersoever our influence may go the great message of the Elder Brother who makes us all one. We give much to the 'heathen' populations within our Empire or the reach of our trade. We give them English laws, English science, English literature, English outlooks on life, the English tongue, English vices—opium, profligacy, and the like. Are these all the gifts that we are bound to carry to heathen lands? Dynamos and encyclopædias, gin and rifles, shirtings and castings? Have we not to carry Christ? And all the more because we are so closely knit with so many of them. I wonder how many of you get the greater part of your living out of India and China?

Surely, if there is a place in England where the missionary appeal should be responded to, it is Manchester. 'As a nest hast thou gathered the riches of the nations.' What have you given? Make up the balance-sheet, brethren. 'We are debtors,' let us put down the items:—

Debtors by a common brotherhood.

Debtors by the possession of Christ for ourselves.

Debtors by benefits received.

Debtors by injuries inflicted.

The debit side of the account is heavy. Let us try to discharge some portion of the debt, in the fashion in which the Apostle from whom I have been quoting thought that he would best discharge it when, after declaring himself debtor to many kinds of men, he added, 'So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel.' May we all say, more truly than we have ever said before, 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard!'

THE SERVANT AND THE SLAVES

'Thy servant David . . .'; 'Thy Holy Servant Jesus . . .'; 'Thy servants.—ACTS iv. 25, 27, 29.

I DO not often take fragments of Scripture for texts; but though these are fragments, their juxtaposition results in by no means fragmentary thoughts. There is obvious intention in the recurrence of the expression so frequently in so few verses, and to the elucidation of that intention my remarks will be directed. The words are parts of the Church's prayer on the occasion of its first collision with the civil power. The incident is recorded at full length because it is the *first* of a long and bloody series, in order that succeeding generations might learn their true weapon and their sure defence. Prayer is the right answer to the world's hostility, and they who only ask for courage to stand by their confession will never ask in vain. But it is no part of my intention to deal either with the incident or with this noble prayer.

A word or two of explanation may be necessary as to the language of our texts. You will observe that, in the second of them, I have followed the Revised Version, which, instead of 'Thy holy child,' as in the Authorised Version, reads 'Thy holy Servant.' The alteration is clearly corre The word, indeed, literally means 'a child,' but, like our own English 'boy,' or even 'man.' or 'maid,' it is used to express the relation of servant, when the desire is to cover over the harsher features of servitude, and to represent the servant as a part of the family. Thus the kindly centurion, who besought Jesus to come and heal his servant, speaks of him as his 'boy.' And that the word is here used in this secondary sense of 'servant' is unmistakable. For there is no discernible reason why, if stress were meant to be laid on Christ as being the Son of God, the recognised expression for that relationship should not have been employed. Again, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, with which the Apostles were familiar, employs the very phrase that is here used as its translation of the well-known Old Testament designation of the Messiah, 'the Servant of the Lord,' and the words here are really a quotation from the great prophecies of the second part of the Book of Isaiah. Further, the same word is employed in reference to King David and in reference to Jesus Christ. In regard to the former, it is evident that it must have the meaning of 'servant'; and it would be too harsh to suppose that in the compass of so few verses the same expression should be used, at one time in the one signification, and at another in the other. So, then, David and Jesus are in some sense classified here together as both servants of God. That is the first point that I desire to make.

Then, in regard to the third of my texts, the expression is not the same there as in the other two. The disciples do not venture to take the loftier designation. Rather they prefer the humble one, 'slaves,' bondmen, the familiar expression found all through the New Testament as almost a synonym to Christians.

So, then, we have here three figures: the Psalmist-king, the Messiah, the disciples; Christ in the midst, on the one hand a servant with whom He deigns to be classed, on the other hand the slaves who, through Him, have become sons. And I think I shall best bring out the intended lessons of these clauses in their connection if I ask you to note these two contrasts, the servants and the Servant; the Servant and the slaves. 'David Thy servant'; 'Thy holy Servant Jesus'; us 'Thy servants.'

I. First, then, notice the servants and the Servant.

The reason for the application of the name to the Psalmist lies, not so much in his personal character or in his religious elevation, as in the fact that he was chosen of God for a specific purpose, to carry on the divine plans some steps towards their realisation. Kings, priests, prophets, the collective Israel, as having a specific function in the world, and being, in some sense, the instruments and embodiments of the will of God amongst men, have in an eminent degree the designation of His 'servants.' And we might widen out the thought and say that all men who, like the heathen Cyrus, are God's shepherds, though they do not know it—guided by Him, though they understand not whence comes their power, and blindly do His work in the world, being 'epoch-making' men, as the fashionable phrase goes now—are really, though in a subordinate sense, entitled to the designation.

But then, whilst this is true, and whilst Jesus Christ comes into this category, and is one of these special men raised up and adapted for special service in connection with the carrying out of the divine purpose, mark how emphatically and broadly the line is drawn here between Him and the other members of the class to which, in a certain sense, He does belong. Peter says, 'Thy servant David,' but he says 'Thy *holy* Servant Jesus.' And in the Greek the emphasis is still stronger, because the definite article is employed before the word 'servant.' '*The* holy Servant of Thine'—that is His specific and unique designation.

There are many imperfect instruments of the divine will. Thinkers and heroes and saints and statesmen and warriors, as well as prophets and priests and kings, are so regarded in Scripture, and may profitably be so regarded by us; but amongst them all there is One who stands in their midst and yet apart from them, because He, and He alone, can say, 'I have done all Thy pleasure, and into my doing of Thy pleasure no bitter leaven of self-regard or by-ends has ever, in the faintest degree, entered.' 'Thy holy Servant Jesus' is the unique designation of *the* Servant of the Lord.

And what is the meaning of *holy*? The word does not originally and primarily refer to character so much as to relation to God. The root idea of holiness is not righteousness nor moral perfectness, but something that lies behind these—viz. separation for the service and uses of God. The first notion of the word is consecration, and, built upon that and resulting from it, moral perfection. So then these men, some of whom had lived beside Jesus Christ for all those years, and had seen everything that He did, and studied Him through and through, had summered and wintered with Him, came away from the close inspection of His character with this thought: He is utterly and entirely devoted to the service of God, and in Him there is neither spot nor wrinkle nor blemish such as is found in all other men.

I need not remind you with what strange persistence of affirmation, and yet with what humility of self-consciousness, our Lord Himself always claimed to be in possession of this entire consecration, and complete obedience, and consequent perfection. Think of human lips saying, 'I do always the things that please Him.' Think of human lips saying, 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me.' Think of a man whose whole life's secret was summed up in this: 'As the Father hath given Me commandment, *so*'—no more, no less, no otherwise—'so I speak.' Think of a man whose inspiring principle was, consciously to himself, 'not My will, but Thine be done'; and who could say that it was so, and not be met by universal ridicule. There followed in Jesus the moral perfectness that comes from such uninterrupted and complete consecration of self to God. 'Thy servant David,'—what about Bathsheba, David? What about a great many other things in your life? The poet-king, with the poet-nature so sensitive to all the delights of sense, and so easily moved in the matter of pleasure, is but like all God's other servants in the fact of imperfection. In every machine power is lost through friction; and in every man, the noblest and the purest, there is resistance to be overcome ere motion in conformity with the divine impulse can be secured. We pass in review before our minds saints and martyrs and lovely characters by the hundred, and amongst them all there is not a jewel without a flaw, not a mirror without some dint in it where the rays are distorted, or some dark place where the reflecting surface has been rubbed away by the attrition of sin, and where there is no reflection of the divine light. And then we turn to that meek Figure who stands there with the question that has been awaiting an answer for nineteen centuries upon His lips, and is unanswered yet: 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?' 'He is the holy Servant,' whose consecration and character mark Him off from all the class to which He belongs as the only one of them all who, in completeness, has executed the Father's purpose, and has never attempted anything contrary to it.

Now there is another step to be taken, and it is this. The Servant who stands out in front of all the group—though the noblest names in the world's history are included therein—could not be *the* Servant unless He were the Son. This designation, as applied to Jesus Christ, is peculiar to these three or four earlier chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. It is interesting because it occurs over and over again there, and because it never occurs anywhere else in the New Testament. If we recognise what I think must be recognised, that it is a quotation from the ancient prophecies, and is an assertion of the Messianic character of Jesus, then I think we here see the Church in a period of transition in regard to their conceptions of their Lord. There is no sign that the proper Sonship and Divinity of our Lord was clear before them at this period. They had the facts, but they had not yet come to the distinct apprehension of how much was involved in these. But, if they knew that Jesus Christ had died and had risen again—and they knew that, for they had seen Him—and if they believed that He was the Messiah, and if they were certain that in His character of Messiah there had been faultlessness and absolute perfection—and they were certain of that, because they had lived beside Him—then it would not be long before they took the next step, and said, as I say, 'He cannot be the Servant unless He is more than man.'

And we may well ask ourselves the question, if we admit, as the world does admit, the moral perfectness of Jesus Christ, how comes it that this Man alone managed to escape failures and deflections from the right, and sins, and that He only carried through life a stainless garment, and went down to the grave never having needed, and not needing then, the exercise of divine forgiveness? Brethren, I venture to say that it is hopeless to account for Jesus Christ on naturalistic principles; and that either you must give up your belief in His sinlessness, or advance, as the Christian Church as a whole advanced, to the other belief, on which alone that perfectness is explicable: 'Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ! Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father!'

II. And so, secondly, let us turn to the other contrast here—the Servant and the slaves.

I said that the humble group of praying, persecuted believers seemed to have wished to take a lower place than their Master's, even whilst they ventured to assume that, in some sense, they too, like Him, were doing the Father's will. So they chose, by a fine instinct of humility rather than from any dogmatical prepossessions, the name that expresses, in its most absolute and roughest form, the notion of bondage and servitude. He is the Servant; we standing here are slaves. And that this is not an overweighting of the word with more than is meant by it seems to be confirmed by the fact that in the first clause of this prayer, we have, for the only time in the New Testament, God addressed as 'Lord' by the correlative word to *slave*, which has been transferred into English, namely, *despot*.

The true position, then, for a man is to be God's slave. The harsh, repellent features of that wicked institution assume an altogether different character when they become the features of my relation to Him. Absolute submission, unconditional obedience, on the slave's part; and on the part of the Master complete ownership, the right of life and death, the right of disposing of all goods and chattels, the right of separating husband and wife, parents and children, the right of issuing commandments without a reason, the right to expect that those commandments shall be swiftly, unhesitatingly, punctiliously, and completely performed—these things inhere in our relation to God. Blessed the man who has learned that they do, and has accepted them as his highest glory and the security of his most blessed life! For, brethren, such submission, absolute and unconditional, the blending and the absorption of my own will in His will, is the secret of all that makes manhood glorious and great and happy.

Remember, however, that in the New Testament these names of slave and owner are transferred to Christians and Jesus Christ. 'The Servant' has His slaves; and He who is God's Servant, and does not His own will but the Father's will, has us for His servants, imposes His will upon us, and we are bound to render to Him a revenue of entire obedience like that which He hath laid at His Father's feet.

Such slavery is the only freedom. Liberty does not mean doing as you like, it means liking as you ought, and doing that. He only is free who submits to God in Christ, and thereby overcomes himself and the world and all antagonism, and is able to do that which it is his life to do. A prison out of which we do not desire to go is no restraint, and the will which coincides with law is the only will that is truly free. You talk about the bondage of obedience. Ah! 'the weight of too much liberty' is a far sorer bondage. They are the slaves who say, 'Let us break His bonds asunder, and cast away His cords from us'; and they are the free men who say, 'Lord, put Thy blessed shackles on my arms, and impose Thy will upon my will, and fill my heart with Thy love; and then will and hands will move freely and delightedly.' 'If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.'

Such slavery is the only nobility. In the wicked old empires, as in some of their modern survivals to-day, viziers and prime ministers were mostly drawn from the servile classes. It is so in God's kingdom. They who make themselves God's slaves are by Him made kings and priests, and shall reign with Him on earth. If we are slaves, then are we sons and heirs of God through Jesus Christ.

Remember the alternative. You cannot be your own masters without being your own slaves. It is a far worse bondage to live as chartered libertines than to walk in the paths of obedience. Better serve God than the devil, than the world, than the flesh. Whilst they promise men liberty, they make them 'the most abject and downtrodden vassals of perdition.'

The Servant-Son makes us slaves and sons. It matters nothing to me that Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled the law of God; it is so much the better for Him, but of no value for me, unless He has the power of making me like Himself. And He has it, and if you will trust yourselves to Him, and give your hearts to Him, and ask Him to govern you, He will govern you; and if you will abandon your false liberty which is servitude, and take the sober freedom which is obedience, then He will bring you to share in His temper of joyful service; and even we may be able to say, 'My meat and my drink is to do the will of Him that sent me,' and truly saying that, we shall have the key to all delights, and our feet will be, at least, on the lower rungs of the ladder whose top reaches to Heaven.

'What fruit had ye in the things of which ye are now ashamed? But being made free from sin, and become the slaves of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness; and the end everlasting life.' Brethren, I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye yield yourselves to Him, crying, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant, Thou hast loosed my bonds.'

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

'And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.'—ACTS iv. 32.

'And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.'—ACTS v. 11.

ONCE more Luke pauses and gives a general survey of the Church's condition. It comes in appropriately at the end of the account of the triumph over the first assault of civil authority, which assault was itself not only baffled, but turned to good. Just because persecution had driven them closer to God and to one another, were the disciples so full of brotherly love and of grace as Luke delights to paint them.

I. We note the fair picture of what the Church once was. The recent large accessions to it might have weakened the first feelings of brotherhood, so that it is by no means superfluous to repeat substantially the features of the earlier description (Acts ii. 44, 45). 'The multitude' is used with great meaning, for it was a triumph of the Spirit's influence that the warm stream of brotherly love ran through so many hearts, knit together only by common submission to Jesus. That oneness of thought and feeling was the direct issue of the influx of the Spirit mentioned as the blessed result of the disciples' dauntless devotion (Acts iv. 31). If our Churches were 'filled with the Holy Ghost,' we too should be fused into oneness of heart and mind, though our organisations as separate communities continued, just as all the little pools below high-water mark are made one when the tide comes up.

The first result and marvellous proof of that oneness was the so-called 'community of goods,' the account of which is remarkable both because it all but fills this picture, and because it is broken into two by verse 33, rapidly summarising other characteristics. The two halves may be considered together, and it may be noted that the former presents the sharing of property as the result of brotherly unity, while the latter traces it ('for,' v. 34) to the abundant divine grace resting on the whole community. The terms of the description should be noted, as completely negativing the notion that the fact in question was anything like compulsory abolition of the right of individual ownership. 'Not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own.' That implies that the right of possession was not abolished. It implies, too, that the common feeling of brotherhood was stronger than the self-centred regard which looks on possessions as to be used for self. Thus they possessed as though they possessed not, and each held his property as a trust from God for his brethren.

We must observe, further, that the act of selling was the owners', as was the act of handing the proceeds to the Apostles. The community had nothing to do with the money till it had been given to them. Further, the distribution was not determined by the rule of equality, but by the 'need' of the recipients; and its result was not that all had share and share alike, but that 'none lacked.'

There is nothing of modern communism in all this, but there is a lesson to the modern Church as to the obligations of wealth and the claims of brotherhood, which is all but universally disregarded. The spectre of communism is troubling every nation, and it will become more and more formidable, unless the Church learns that the only way to lay it is to live by the precepts of Jesus and to repeat in new forms the spirit of the primitive Church. The Christian sense of stewardship, not the abolition of the right of property, is the cure for the hideous facts which drive men to shriek 'Property is theft.'

Luke adds two more points to his survey,—the power of the Apostolic testimony, and the great grace which lay like a bright cloud on the whole Church. The Apostles' special office was to bear witness to the Resurrection. They held a position of prominence in the Church by virtue of having been chosen by Jesus and having been His companions, but the Book of Acts is silent about any of the other mysterious powers which later ages have ascribed to them. The only Apostles who appear in it are Peter, John, and James, the last only in a parenthesis recording His martyrdom. Their peculiar work was to say, 'Behold! we saw, and know that He died and rose again.'

II. The general description is followed by one example of the surrender of wealth, which is noteworthy as being done by one afterwards to play a great part in the book, and also as leading on to an example of hypocritical pretence. Side by side stand Barnabas and the wretched couple, Ananias and Sapphira.

Luke introduces the new personage with some particularity, and, as he does not go into detail without good reason, we must note his description. First, the man's character is given, as expressed in the name bestowed by the Apostles, in imitation of Christ's frequent custom. He must have been for some time a disciple, in order that his special gift should have been recognised. He was a 'son of exhortation'; that is, he had the power of rousing and encouraging the faith and stirring the believing energy of the brethren. An example of this was given in Antioch, where he 'exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.' So much the more beautiful was his self-effacement when with Paul, for it was the latter who was 'the chief speaker.' Barnabas felt that his gift was less than his brother's, and so, without jealousy, took the second place. He, being silent, yet speaketh, and bids us learn our limits, and be content to be surpassed.

We are next told his rank. He was a Levite. The tribe to which a disciple belongs is seldom mentioned, but probably the reason for specifying Barnabas' was the same as led Luke, in another place, to record that 'a great company of the priests was obedient to the faith.' The connection of the tribe of Levi with the Temple worship made accessions from it significant, as showing how surely the new faith was creeping into the very heart of the old system, and winning converts from the very classes most interested in opposing it. Barnabas' significance is further indicated by the notice that he was 'a man of Cyprus,' and as such, the earliest mentioned of the Hellenists or foreign-born and Greek-speaking Jews, who were to play so important a part in the expansion of the Church.

His first appearance witnessed to the depth and simple genuineness of his character and faith. The old law forbidding Levites to hold land had gradually become inoperative, and perhaps Barnabas' estate was in Cyprus, though more probably it was, like that of his relative Mary, the mother of Mark, in Jerusalem. He did as many others were doing, and brought the proceeds to the assembly of the brethren, and there publicly laid them at the Apostles' feet, in token of their authority to administer them as they thought well.

III. Why was Barnabas' act singled out for mention, since there was nothing peculiar about it? Most likely because it stimulated Ananias and his wife to imitation. Wherever there are signal instances of Christian self-sacrifice, there will spring up a crop of base copies. Ananias follows Barnabas as surely as the shadow the substance. It was very likely a pure impulse which led him and his wife to agree to sell their land; and it was only when they had the money in their hands, and had to take the decisive step of parting with it, and reducing themselves to pennilessness, that they found the surrender harder than they could carry out. Satan spoils many a well-begun work, and we often break down half-way through a piece of Christian unselfishness. Well begun is half—but only half—ended.

Be that as it may, Peter's stern words to Ananias put all the stress of the sin on its being an acted lie. The motives of the trick are not disclosed. They may have been avarice, want of faith, greed of applause, reluctance to hang back when others were doing like Barnabas. It is hard to read the mingled motives which lead ourselves wrong, and harder to separate them in the case of another. How much Ananias kept back is of no moment; indeed, the less he retained the greater the sin; for it is baser, as well as more foolish, to do wrong for a little advantage than for a great one.

Peter's two questions bring out very strikingly the double source of the sin. 'Why hath Satan filled thy heart?'—an awful antithesis to being filled with the Spirit. Then there is a real, malign Tempter, who can pour evil affections and purposes into men's hearts. But he cannot do it unless the man opens his heart, as that 'why?' implies. The same thought of our co-operation and concurrence, so that, however Satan suggests, it is we who are guilty, comes out in the second question, 'How is it that *thou* hast conceived this thing in thy heart?' Reverently we may venture to say that not only Christ stands at the door and knocks, but that the enemy of Him and His stands there too, and he too enters 'if any man opens the door.' Neither heaven nor hell can come in unless we will.

The death of Ananias was not inflicted by Peter. 'Hearing these words' he 'fell down and' died. Surely that expression suggests that the stern words had struck at his life, and that his death was the result of the agitation of shame and guilt which they excited. That does not at all conflict with regarding his death as a punitive divine act.

One can fancy the awed silence that fell on the congregation, and the restrained, mournful movement that ran through it when Sapphira entered. Why the two had not come in company can only be conjectured. Perhaps the husband had gone straight to the Apostles after completing the sale, and had left the wife to follow at her convenience. Perhaps she had not intended to come at all, but had grown alarmed at the delay in Ananias' return. She may have come in fear that something had gone wrong, and that fear would be increased by her not seeing her husband in her quick glance round the company.

If she came expecting to receive applause, the silence and constraint that hung over the assembly must have stirred a fear that something terrible had happened, which would be increased by Peter's question. It was a merciful opportunity given her to separate herself from the sin and the punishment; but her lie was glib, and indicated determination to stick to the fraud. That moment was heavy with her fate, and she knew it not; but she knew that she had the opportunity of telling the truth, and she did not take it. She had to make the hard choice which we have sometimes to make, to be true to some sinful bargain or be true to God, and she chose the worse part. Which of the two was tempter and which was tempted matters little. Like many a wife, she thought that it was better to be loyal to her husband than to God, and so her honour was 'rooted in dishonour,' and she was falsely true and truly false.

The judgment on Sapphira was not inflicted by Peter. He foretold it by his prophetic power, but it was the hand of God which vindicated the purity of the infant Church. The terrible severity of the punishment can only be understood by remembering the importance of preserving the young community from corruption at the very beginning. Unless the vermin are cleared from the springing plant, it will not grow. As Achan's death warned Israel at the beginning of their entrance into the promised land, so Ananias and Sapphira perished, that all generations of the Church might fear to pretend to self-surrender while cherishing its opposite, and might feel that they have to give account to One who knows the secrets of the heart, and counts nothing as given if anything is surreptitiously kept back.

WHOM TO OBEY,—ANNAS OR ANGEL?

'Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, 18. And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison. 19. But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20. Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. 21. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23. Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within. 24. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow. 25. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. 26. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned. 27. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28. Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. 29. Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men. 30. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. 31. Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. 32. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him.'—ACTS v. 17-32.

THE Jewish ecclesiastics had been beaten in the first round of the fight, and their attempt to put out the fire had only stirred the blaze. Popular sympathy is fickle, and if the crowd does not shout with the persecutors, it will make heroes and idols of the persecuted. So the Apostles had gained favour by the attempt to silence them, and that led to the second round, part of which is described in this passage.

The first point to note is the mean motives which influenced the high-priest and his adherents. As before, the Sadducees were at the bottom of the assault; for talk about a resurrection was gall and wormwood to them. But Luke alleges a much more contemptible emotion than zeal for supposed truth as the motive for action. The word rendered in the Authorised Version 'indignation,' is indeed literally 'zeal,' but it here means, as the Revised Version has it, nothing nobler than 'jealousy.' 'Who are those ignorant Galileans that they should encroach on the office of us dignified teachers? and what fools the populace must be to listen to them! Our prestige is threatened. If we don't bestir ourselves, our authority will be gone.' A lofty spirit in which to deal with grave movements of opinion, and likely to lead its possessors to discern truth!

The Sanhedrin, no doubt, talked solemnly about the progress of error, and the duty of firmly putting it down, and, like Jehu, said, 'Come, and see our zeal for the Lord'; but it was zeal for greetings in the market-place, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the other advantages of their position. So it has often been since. The instruments which zeal for truth uses are argument, Scripture, and persuasion. That zeal which betakes itself to threats and force is, at the best, much mingled with the wrath and jealousy of man.

The arrest of the Apostles and their committal to prison was simply for detention, not punishment. The rulers cast their net wider this time, and secured all the Apostles, and, having them safe under lock and key, they went home triumphant, and expecting to deal a decisive blow to-morrow. Then comes one of the great 'buts' of Scripture. Annas and Caiaphas thought that they had scored a success, but an angel upset their calculations. To try to explain the miracle away is hopeless. It is wiser to try to understand it.

The very fact that it did not lead to the Apostles' deliverance, but that the trial and scourging followed next day, just as if it had not happened, which has been alleged as a proof of its uselessness, and inferentially of its falsehood, puts us on the right track. It was not meant for their deliverance, but for their heartening, and for the bracing of all generations of Christians, by showing, at the first conflict with the civil power, that the Lord was with His Church. His strengthening power is operative when no miracle is wrought. If His servants are not delivered, it is not that He lacks angels, but that it is better for them and the Church that they should lie in prison or die at the stake.

The miracle was a transient revelation of a perpetual truth, and has shed light on many a dark dungeon where God's servants have lain rotting. It breathed heroic constancy into the Twelve. How striking and noble was their prompt obedience to the command to resume the perilous work of preaching! As soon as the dawn began to glimmer over Olivet, and the priests were preparing for the morning sacrifice, there were these irrepressible disturbers, whom the officials thought they had shut up safely last night, lifting up their voices again as if nothing had happened. What a picture of dauntless persistence, and what a lesson for us! The moment the pressure is off, we should spring back to our work of witnessing for Christ.

The bewilderment of the Council comes in strong contrast with the unhesitating action of the Apostles. There is a half ludicrous side to it, which Luke does not try to hide. There was the pompous assembling of all the great men at early morning, and their dignified waiting till their underlings brought in the culprits. No doubt, Annas put on his severest air of majesty, and all were prepared to look their sternest for the confusion of the prisoners. The prison, the

Temple, and the judgment hall, were all near each other. So there was not long to wait. But, behold! the officers come back alone, and their report shakes the assembly out of its dignity. One sees the astonished underlings coming up to the prison, and finding all in order, the sentries patrolling, the doors fast (so the angel had shut them as well as opened them), and then entering ready to drag out the prisoners, and—finding all silent. Such elaborate guard kept over an empty cage!

It was not the officers' business to offer explanations, and it does not seem that any were asked. One would have thought that the sentries would have been questioned. Herod went the natural way to work, when he had Peter's guards examined and put to death. But Annas and his fellows do not seem to have cared to inquire how the escape had been made. Possibly they suspected a miracle, or perhaps feared that inquiry might reveal sympathisers with the prisoners among their own officials. At any rate, they were bewildered, and lost their heads, wondering what was to come next, and how this thing was to end.

The further news that these obstinate fanatics were at their old work in the Temple again, must have greatly added to the rulers' perplexity, and they must have waited the return of the officers sent off for the second time to fetch the prisoners, with somewhat less dignity than before. The officers felt the pulse of the crowd, and did not venture on force, from wholesome fear for their own skins. An excited mob in the Temple court was not to be trifled with, so persuasion was adopted. The brave Twelve went willingly, for the Sanhedrin had no terrors for them, and by going they secured another opportunity of ringing out their Lord's salvation. Wherever a Christian can witness for Christ, he should be ready to go.

The high-priest discreetly said nothing about the escape. Possibly he had no suspicion of a miracle, but, even if he had, chapter iv. 16 shows that that would not have led to any modification of his hostility. Persecutors, clothed with a little brief authority, are strangely blind to the plainest indications of the truth spoken by their victims. Annas did not know what a question about the escape might bring out, so he took the safer course of charging the Twelve with disobedience to the Sanhedrin's prohibition. How characteristic of all his kind that is! Never mind whether what the martyr says is true or not. He has broken our law, and defied our authority; that is enough. Are we to be chopping logic, and arguing with every ignorant upstart who chooses to vent his heresies? Gag him,—that is easier and more dignified.

A world of self-consequence peeps out in that '*we* straitly charged you,' and a world of contempt peeps out in the avoidance of naming Jesus. 'This name' and 'this man' is the nearest that the proud priest will come to soiling his lips by mentioning Him. He bears unconscious testimony to the Apostles' diligence, and to the popular inclination to them, by charging them with having filled the city with what he contemptuously calls '*your* teaching,' as if it had no other source than their own ignorant notions.

Then the deepest reason for the Sanhedrin's bitterness leaks out in the charge of inciting the mob to take vengeance on them for the death of Jesus. It was true that the Apostles had charged that guilt home on them, but not on them only, but on the whole nation, so that no incitement to revenge lay in the charge. It was true that they had brought 'this man's blood' on the rulers, but only to draw them to repentance, not to hound at them their sharers in the guilt. Had Annas forgot 'His blood be on us, and on our children'? But, when an evil deed is complete, the doers try to shuffle off the responsibility which they were ready to take in the excitement of hurrying to do it. Annas did not trouble himself about divine vengeance; it was the populace whom he feared.

So, in its attempt to browbeat the accused, in its empty airs of authority, in its utter indifference to the truth involved, in its contempt for the preachers and their message, in its brazen denial of responsibility, its dread of the mob, and its disregard of the far-off divine judgment, his bullying speech is a type of how persecutors, from Roman governors down, have hectored their victims.

And Peter's brave answer is, thank God! the type of what thousands of trembling women and meek men have answered. His tone is severer now than on his former appearance. Now he has no courteous recognition of the court's authority. Now he brushes aside all Annas's attempts to impose on him the sanctity of its decrees, and flatly denies that the Council has any more right to command than any other 'men.' They claimed to be depositaries of God's judgments. This revolutionary fisherman sees nothing in them but 'men,' whose commands point one way, while God's point the other The angel bade them 'speak'; the Council had bid them be dumb. To state the opposition was to determine their duty. Formerly Peter had said 'judge ye' which command it is right to obey. Now, he wraps his refusal in no folds of courtesy, but thrusts the naked 'We must obey God' in the Council's face. That was a great moment in the history of the world and the Church. How much lay in it, as in a seed,—Luther's 'Here I stand, I can do none other, God help me! Amen'; Plymouth Rock, and many a glorious and blood-stained page in the records of martyrdom.

Peter goes on to vindicate his assumption that in disobeying Annas they are obeying God, by reiterating the facts which since Pentecost he had pressed on the national conscience. Israel had slain, and God had exalted, Jesus to His right hand. That was God's verdict on Israel's action. But it was also the ground of hope for Israel; for the exaltation of Jesus was that He might be 'Prince [or Leader] and Saviour,' and from His exalted hand were shed the gifts of 'repentance and remission of sins,' even of the great sin of slaying Him. These things being so, how could the Apostles be silent? Had not God bid them speak, by their very knowledge of these? They were Christ's witnesses, constituted as such by their personal acquaintance with Him and their having seen Him raised and ascending, and appointed to be such by His own lips, and inspired for their witnessing by the Holy Spirit shed on them at Pentecost. Peter all but reproduces the never-to-be-forgotten words heard by them all in the upper room, 'He shall bear witness of Me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning.' Silence would be treason. So it is still. What were Annas and his bluster to men whom Christ had bidden to speak, and to whom He had given the Spirit of the Father to speak in them?

OUR CAPTAIN

'Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince.'—ACTS v. 31.

THE word rendered 'Prince' is a rather infrequent designation of our Lord in Scripture. It is only employed in all four times—twice in Peter's earlier sermons recorded in this Book of the Acts; and twice in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In a former discourse of the Apostle's he had spoken of the crime of the Jews in killing 'the Prince of life.' Here he uses the word without any appended epithet. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read once of the 'Captain of Salvation,' and once of the 'Author of Faith.'

Now these three renderings 'Prince,' 'Captain,' 'Author,' seem singularly unlike. But the explanation of their being all substantially equivalent to the original word is not difficult to find. It seems to mean properly a Beginner, or Originator, who takes the lead in anything, and hence the notions of chieftainship and priority are easily deduced from it. Then, very naturally, it comes to mean something very much like *cause*; with only this difference, that it implies that the person who is the Originator is Himself the Possessor of that of which He is the Cause to others. So the two ideas of a Leader, and of a Possessor who imparts, are both included in the word.

My intention in this sermon is to deal with the various forms of this expression, in order to try to bring out the fulness of the notion which Scripture attaches to this leadership of Jesus Christ. He is first of all, generally, as our text sets Him forth, the Leader, absolutely. Then there are the specific aspects, expressed by the other three passages, in which He is set forth as the Leader through death to life; the Leader through suffering to salvation; and the Leader in the path of faith. Let us look, then, at these points in succession.

I. First, we have the general notion of Christ the Leader.

Now I suppose we are all acquainted with the fact that the names 'Joshua' and 'Jesus' are, in the original, one. It is further to be noticed that, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was familiar to Peter's hearers, the word of our text is that employed to describe the office of the military leaders of Israel. It is still further to be observed that, in all the instances in the New Testament, it is employed in immediate connection with the name of Jesus. Now, putting all these things together, remembering to whom Peter was speaking, remembering the familiarity which many of his audience must have had with the Old Testament in its Greek translation, remembering the identity of the two names Joshua and Jesus, it is difficult to avoid the supposition that the expression of our text is coloured by a reference to the bold soldier who successfully led his brethren into the Promised Land. Joshua was the 'Captain of the Lord's host' to lead them to Canaan; the second Joshua is the Captain of the Host of the Lord to lead them to a better rest. Of all the Old Testament heroes perhaps there is none, at first sight, less like the second Joshua than the first was. He is only a rough, plain, prompt, and bold soldier. No prophet was he, no word of wisdom ever fell from his lips, no trace of tenderness was in anything that he did; meekness was alien from his character, he was no sage, he was no saint, but decisive, swift, merciless when necessary, full of resource, sharp and hard as his own sword. And yet a parallel may be drawn.

The second Joshua is the Captain of the Lord's host, as was typified to the first one, in that strange scene outside the walls of Jericho, where the earthly commander, sunk in thought, was brooding upon the hard nut which he had to crack, when suddenly he lifted up his eyes, and beheld a man with a drawn sword. With the instinctive alertness of his profession and character, his immediate question was, 'Art thou for us or for our enemies?' And he got the answer 'No! I am not on thy side, nor on the other side, but thou art on Mine. As Captain of the Lord's host am I come up.'

So Jesus Christ, the 'Strong Son of God,' is set forth by this military emblem as being Himself the first Soldier in the army of God, and the Leader of all the host. We forget far too much the militant character of Jesus Christ. We think of His meekness, His gentleness, His patience, His tenderness, His humility, and we cannot think of these too much, too lovingly, too wonderingly, too adoringly, but we too often forget the strength which underlay the gentleness, and that His life, all gracious as it was, when looked at from the outside, had beneath it a continual conflict, and was in effect the warfare of God against all the evils and the sorrows of humanity. We forget the courage that went to make the gentleness of Jesus, the daring that underlay His lowliness; and it does us good to remember that all the so-called heroic virtues were set forth in supreme form, not in some vulgar type of excellence, such as a conqueror, whom the world recognises, but in that meek King whose weapon was love, yet was wielded with a soldier's hand.

This general thought of Jesus Christ as the first Soldier and Captain of the Lord's army not only opens for us a side of His character which we too often pass by, but it also says something to us as to what our duties ought to be. He stands to us in the relation of General and Commander-in-Chief; then we stand to Him in the relation of private soldiers, whose first duty is unhesitating obedience, and who in doing their Master's will must put forth a bravery far higher than the vulgar courage that is crowned with wreathed laurels on the bloody battlefield, even the bravery that is caught from Him who 'set His face as a flint' to do His work.

Joshua's career has in it a great stumbling-block to many people, in that merciless destruction of the Canaanite sinners, which can only be vindicated by remembering, first, that it was a divine appointment, and that God has the right to punish; and, second, that those old days were under a different law, or at least a less manifestly developed law of loving-kindness and mercy than, thank God! we live in. But whilst we look with wonder on these awful scenes of destruction, may there not lie in them the lesson for us that antagonism and righteous wrath against evil in all its forms is the duty of the soldiers of Christ? There are many causes to-day which to further and fight for is the bounden duty of every Christian, and to further and fight for which will tax all the courage that any of us can muster. Remember that the leadership of Christ is no mere pretty metaphor, but a solemn fact, which brings with it the soldier's responsibilities. When our Centurion says to us, 'Come!' we must come. When He says to us, 'Go!' we must go. When He says to us 'Do this!' we must do it, though heart and flesh should shrink and fail. Unhesitating obedience to His authoritative command will deliver us from many of the miseries of self-will; and brave effort at Christ's side is as much the privilege as the duty of His servants and soldiers.

II. So note, secondly, the Leader through death to life.

Peter, in the sermon which is found in the third chapter of this Book of the Acts, has his mind and heart filled with the astounding fact of the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, and in the same breath as he gives forth the paradoxical indictment of the Jewish sin, 'You have killed the Prince of Life'—the Leader of Life—he also says, 'And God hath raised Him from the dead.' So that the connection seems to point to the risen and glorified life into which Christ Himself passed, and by passing became capable of imparting it to others. The same idea is here as in Paul's other metaphor: 'Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept'—the first sheaf of the harvest, which was carried into the Temple and consecrated to God, and was the pledge and prophecy of the reaping in due season of all the miles of golden grain that waved in the autumn sunshine. 'So,' says Peter, 'He is the Leader of Life, who Himself has passed through the darkness, for "you killed Him"; mystery of mysteries as it is that you should have been able to do it, deeper mystery still that you should have been willing to do it, deepest mystery of all that you did it not when you did it, but that "He became dead and is alive for evermore." You killed the Prince of Life. and God raised Him from the dead.'

He has gone before us. He is 'the first that should rise from the dead.' For, although the partial power of His communicated life did breathe for a moment resuscitation into two dead men and one dead maiden, these shared in no resurrection-life, but only came back again into mortality, and were quickened for a time, but to die at last the common death of all. But Jesus Christ is the first that has gone into the darkness and come back again to live for ever. Across the untrodden wild there is one track marked, and the footprints upon it point both ways—to the darkness and from the darkness. So the dreary waste is not pathless any more. The broad road that all the generations have trodden on their way into the everlasting darkness is left now, and the 'travellers pass by the byway' which Jesus Christ has made by the touch of His risen feet.

Thus, not only does this thought teach us the priority of His resurrection-life, but it also declares to us that Jesus Christ, possessing the risen life, possesses it to impart it. For, as I remarked in my introductory observations, the conception of this word includes not only the idea of a Leader, but that of One who, Himself possessing or experiencing something, gives it to others. All men rise again. Yes, 'but every man in his own order.' There are two principles at work in the resurrection of all men. They are raised on different grounds, and they are raised to different issues. They that are Christ's are brought again from the dead, because the life of Christ is in them; and it is as 'impossible' that they, as that 'He, should be holden of it.' Union with Jesus Christ by simple faith is the means, and the only means revealed to us, whereby men shall be raised from the dead at the last by a resurrection which is anything else than a prolonged death. As for others, 'some shall rise unto shame and everlasting contempt,' rising dead, and dead after they are risen—dead as long as they live. There be two resurrections, whether simultaneous in time or not is of no moment, and all of us must have our part in the one or the other; and faith in Jesus Christ is the only means by which we can take a place in the great army and procession that He leads down into the valley and up to the sunny heights.

If He be the Leader through death unto life, then it is certain that all who follow in His train shall attain to His side and shall share in His glory. The General wears no order which the humblest private in the ranks may not receive likewise, and whomsoever He leads, His leading will not end till He has led them close to His side, if they trust Him. So, calmly, confidently, we may each of us look forward to that dark journey waiting for us all. All our friends will leave us at the tunnel's mouth, but He will go with us through the gloom, and bring us out into the sunny lands on the southern side of the icy white mountains. The Leader of our souls will be our Guide, not only unto death, but far beyond it, into His own life.

III. So, thirdly, note the Leader through suffering to salvation.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is written, 'It became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain'—or the Leader—'of their salvation perfect through sufferings.' That expression might seem at first to shut Jesus Christ out from any participation in the thing which He gives. For salvation is His gift, but not that which He Himself possesses and enjoys; but it is to be noticed that in the context of the words which I have quoted, 'glory' is put as substantially synonymous with salvation, and that the whole is suffused with the idea of a long procession, as shown by the phrase, 'bringing many sons.' Of this procession Jesus Christ Himself is the Leader.

So, clearly, the notion in the context now under consideration is that the life of Jesus Christ is the type to which all His servants are to be conformed. He is the Representative Man, who Himself passes through the conditions through which we are to pass, and Himself reaches the glory which, given to us, becomes salvation.

'Christ is perfected through sufferings.' So must we be. Perfected through sufferings? you say. Then did His humanity need perfecting? Yes, and No. There needed nothing to be hewn away from that white marble. There was nothing to be purged by fire out of that pure life. But I suppose that Jesus Christ's human nature needed to be unfolded by life; as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, 'He learned obedience, though He were a Son, through the things which He suffered.' And fitness for His office of leading us to glory required to be reached through the sufferings which were the condition of our forgiveness and of our acceptance with God. So, whether we regard the word as expressing the agony of suffering in unfolding His humanity, or in fitting Him for His redeeming work, it remains true that He was perfected by His sufferings.

So must we be. Our characters will never reach the refinement, the delicacy, the unworldliness, the dependence upon God, which they require for their completion, unless we have been passed through many a sorrow. There are plants which require a touch of frost to perfect them, and we all need the discipline of a Father's hand. The sorrows that come to us all are far more easily borne when we think that Christ bore them all before us. It is but a blunted sword which sorrow wields against any of us; it was blunted on His armour. It is but a spent ball that strikes us; its force was exhausted upon Him. Sorrow, if we keep close to Him, may become solemn joy, and knit us more thoroughly to Himself. Ah, brother! we can better spare our joys than we can spare our sorrows. Only let us cleave to Him when they fall upon us.

Christ's sufferings led Him to His glory, so will ours if we keep by His side—and only if we do. There is nothing in the mere fact of being tortured and annoyed here on earth, which has in itself any direct and necessary tendency to prepare us for the enjoyment, or to secure to us the possession, of future blessedness. You often hear superficial people saying, 'Oh! he has been very much troubled here, but there will be amends for it hereafter.' Yes; God would wish to make amends for it hereafter, but He cannot do so unless we comply with the conditions. And it needs that we should keep close to Jesus Christ in sorrow, in order that it should work for us 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness.' The glory will come if the patient endurance has preceded, and has been patience drawn from Jesus.

> 'I wondered at the beauteous hours,
> The slow result of winter showers,
> You scarce could see the grass for flowers.'

The sorrows that have wounded any man's head like a crown of thorns will be covered with the diadem of Heaven, if they are sorrows borne with Christ.

IV. Lastly, we have Jesus, the Leader in the path of faith.

'The Author of faith,' says the verse in the Epistle to the Hebrews. 'Author' does not cover all the ground, though it does part of it. We must include the other ideas which I have been trying to set forth. He is 'Possessor' first and 'Giver' afterwards. For Jesus Christ Himself is both the Pattern and the Inspirer of our faith. It would unduly protract my remarks to dwell adequately upon this; but let me just briefly hint some thoughts connected with it.

Jesus Christ Himself walked by continual faith. His manhood depended upon God, just as ours has to depend upon Jesus. He lived in the continued reception of continual strength from above by reason of His faith, just as our faith is the condition of our reception of His strength. We are sometimes afraid to recognise the fact that the Man Jesus, who is our pattern in all things, is our pattern in this, the most special and peculiarly human aspect of the religious life. But if Christ was not the first of believers, His pattern is wofully defective in its adaptation to our need. Rather let us rejoice in the thought that all that great muster-roll of the heroes of the faith, which the Epistle to the Hebrews has been dealing with, have for their Leader—though, chronologically, He marches in the centre—Jesus Christ, of whose humanity this is the document and proof that He says, in the Prophet's words: 'I will put My trust in Him.'

Remember, too, that the same Jesus who is the Pattern is the Object and the Inspirer of our faith; and that if we fulfil the conditions in the text now under consideration, 'looking off' from all others, stimulating and beautiful as their example may be, sweet and tender as their love may be, and 'looking unto Jesus,' He will be in us, and above us—in us to inspire, and above us to receive and to reward our humble confidence.

So, dear friends, it all comes to this, 'Follow thou Me!' In that commandment all duty is summed, and in obeying it all blessedness and peace are ensured. If we will take Christ for our Captain, He will teach our fingers to fight. If we obey Him we shall not want guidance, and be saved from perplexities born of self-will. If we keep close to Him and turn our eyes to Him, away from all the false and fleeting joys and things of earth, we shall not walk in darkness, howsoever earthly lights may be quenched, but the gloomiest path will be illuminated by His presence, and the roughest made smooth by His bleeding feet that passed along it. If we follow Him, He will lead us down into the dark valley, and up into the blessed sunshine, where participation in His own eternal life and glory will be salvation. If we march in His ranks on earth, then shall we

> 'With joy upon our heads arise
> And meet our Captain in the skies.'

GAMALIEL'S COUNSEL

'Refrain from these men, and let them alone; for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: 39. But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.'—ACTS v. 38, 39.

THE little that is known of Gamaliel seems to indicate just such a man as would be likely to have given the advice in the text. His was a character which, on its good side and by its admirers, would be described as prudent, wise, cautious and calm, tolerant, opposed to fanaticism and violence. His position as president of the Sanhedrin, his long experience, his Rabbinical training, his old age, and his knowledge that the national liberty depended on keeping things quiet, would be very likely to exaggerate such tendencies into what his enemies would describe as worldly shrewdness without a trace of enthusiasm, indifference to truth, and the like.

It is, of course, possible that he bases his counsel of letting the followers of Jesus alone, on the grounds which he adduces, because he knew that reasons more favourable to Christians would have had no weight with the Sanhedrin. Old Church traditions make him out to have been a Christian, and the earliest Christian romance, a very singular book, of which the main object was to blacken the Apostle Paul, roundly asserts that at the date of this advice he was 'secretly our brother,' and that he remained in the Sanhedrin to further Christian views. But there seems not the slightest reason to suppose that. He lived and died a Jew, spared the sight of the destruction of Jerusalem which, according to his own canon in the text, would have proved that the system to which he had given his life was not of God; and the only relic of his wisdom is a prayer against Christian heretics.

It is remarkable that he should have given this advice; but two things occur to account for it. Thus far Christianity had been very emphatically the preaching of the Resurrection, a truth which the Pharisees believed and held as especially theirs in opposition to the Sadducees. and Gamaliel was old and worldly-wise enough to count all as his friends who were the enemies of his enemies. He was not very particular where he looked for allies, and rather shrank from helping Sadducees to punish men whose crime was that they 'preached through Jesus a resurrection from the dead.'

Then the Jewish rulers had a very ticklish part to play. They were afraid of any popular shout which might bring down the avalanche of Roman power on them, and they were nervously anxious to keep things quiet. So Gamaliel did not wish to have any fuss made about 'these men,' lest it should be supposed that another popular revolt was on foot; and he thought that to let them alone was the best way to reduce their importance. Perhaps, too, there was a secret hope in the old man's mind, which he scarcely ventured to look at and dared not speak, that here might be the beginning of a rising which had more promise in it than that abortive one under Theudas. He could not venture to say this, but perhaps it made him chary of voting for repression. He had no objection to let these poor Galileans fling away their lives in storming against the barrier of Rome. If they fail, it is but one more failure. If they succeed, he and his like will say that they have done well. But while the enterprise is too perilous for him to approve or be mixed up in it, he would let it have its chance.

Note that Gamaliel regards the whole movement as the probable germ of an uprising against Rome, as is seen from the parallels that he quotes. It is not as a religious teaching which is true or false, but as a political agitation, that he looks at Christianity.

It is to his credit that he stood calm and curbed the howling of the fanatics round him, and that he was the first and only Jewish authority who counselled abstinence from persecution.

It is interesting to compare him with Gallio, who had a glimpse of the true relation of the civil magistrate to religious opinion. Gamaliel has a glimpse of the truth of the impotence of material force against truth, how it is of a quick and spiritual essence, which cannot be cleaved in pieces with a sword, but lives on in spite of all. But while all this may be true, the advice on the whole is a low and bad one. It rests on false principles; it takes a false view of a man's duty; it is not wholly sincere; and it is one impossible to be carried out. It is singularly in accordance with many of the tendencies of this age, and with modes of thought and counsels of action which are in active operation amongst us to-day, and we may therefore criticise it now.

I. Here is disbelief professing to be 'honest doubt.' Gamaliel professes not to have materials for judging. 'If—if'; was it a time for 'ifs'? What was that Sanhedrin there for, but to try precisely such cases as these?

They had had the works of Christ; miracles which they had investigated and could not disprove; a life which was its own witness; prophecies fulfilled; His own presence before their bar; the Resurrection and the Pentecost.

I am not saying whether these facts were enough to have convinced them, nor even whether the alleged miracles were true. All that I am concerned with is that, so far as we know, neither Gamaliel nor any of his tribe had ever made the slightest attempt to inquire into them, but had, without examination, complacently treated them as lies. All that body of evidence had been absolutely ignored. And now he is, with his 'ifs,' posing as very calm and dispassionate.

So to-day it is fashionable to doubt, to hang up most of the Christian truths in the category of uncertainties.

(*a*) When that is the fashion, we need to be on our guard.

(*b*) If you doubt, have you ever taken the pains to examine?

(*c*) If you doubt, you are bound to go further, and either reach belief or rejection. Doubt is not the permanent condition for a man. The central truth of Christianity is either to be received or rejected.

II. Here is disbelief masquerading as suspension of judgment.

Gamaliel talked as if he did not know, or had not decided in his own mind, whether the disciples' claims for their Master were just or not. But the attitude of impartiality and hesitation was the cover of rooted unbelief. He speaks as if the alternative was that either this 'counsel and work' was 'of man' or 'of God.' But he would have been nearer the truth if he had stated the antithesis—God or devil; a glorious truth or a hell-born lie. If Christ's work was not a revelation from above, it was certainly an emanation from beneath.

We sometimes hear disbelief, in our own days, talking in much the same fashion. Have we never listened to teachers who first of all prove to their own satisfaction that Jesus is a myth, that all the gospel story is unreliable, and all the gospel message a dream, and then turn round and overflow in praise of Him and in admiration of it? Browning's professor in *Christmas Day* first of all reduces 'the pearl of price' to dust and ashes, and then

> 'Bids us, when we least expect it,
> Take back our faith—if it be not just whole,
> Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it.'

And that is very much the tone of not a few very superior persons to-day. But let us have one thing or the other—a Christ who was what He claimed to be, the Incarnate Word of God, who died for our sins and rose again for our justification; or a Galilean peasant who was either a visionary or an impostor, like Judas of Galilee and Theudas.

III. Here is success turned into a criterion of truth.

It is such, no doubt, in the long run, but not till then, and so till the end it is utterly false to argue that a thing is true because multitudes think it to be so. The very opposite is more nearly true. It is usually minorities who have been right.

Gamaliel laid down an immoral principle, which is only too popular to-day, in relation to religion and to much else.

IV. Here is a selfish neutrality pretending to be judicial calmness.

Even if it were true that success is a criterion, we have to help God to ensure the success of His truth. No doubt, taking sides is very inconvenient to a cool, tolerant man of the world. And it is difficult to be in a party without becoming a partisan. We know all the beauty of mild, tolerant wisdom, and that truth is usually shared between combatants, but the dangers of extremes and exaggeration must be faced, and perhaps these are better than the cool indifference of the eclectic, sitting apart, holding no form of creed, but contemplating all. It is not good for a man to stand aloof when his brethren are fighting.

In every age some great causes which are God's are pressing for decision. In many of them we may be disqualified for taking sides. But feel that you are bound to cast your influence on the side which conscience approves, and bound to settle which side that is. Deborah's fierce curse against Meroz because its people came not up to the help of the Lord against the mighty was deserved.

But the region in which such judicial calmness, which shrinks from taking its side, is most fatal and sadly common, is in regard to our own individual relation to Jesus, and in regard to the establishment of His kingdom among men.

'He that is not with Me is against Me.' Neutrality is opposition. Not to gather with Him is to scatter. Not to choose Him is to reject Him.

Gamaliel had a strange notion of what constituted 'refraining from these men and letting them alone,' and he betrayed his real position and opposition by his final counsel to scourge them, before letting them go. That is what the world's neutrality comes to.

How poor a figure this politic ecclesiastic, mostly anxious not to commit himself, ready to let whoever would risk a struggle with Rome, so that he kept out of the fray and survived to profit by it, cuts beside the disciples, who had chosen their side, had done with 'ifs,' and went away from the Council rejoicing 'that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name'! Who would not rather be Peter or John with their bleeding backs than Gamaliel, sitting soft in his presidential chair, and too cautious to commit himself to an opinion whether the name of Jesus was that of a prophet or a pretender?

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

'Men . . . full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.' . . . 'A man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. . . .' 'Stephen, full of faith and power.'—Acts vi. 3, 5, 8.

I HAVE taken the liberty of wrenching these three fragments from their context, because of their remarkable parallelism, which is evidently intended to set us thinking of the connection of the various characteristics which they set forth. The first of them is a description, given by the Apostles, of the sort of man whom they conceived to be fit to look after the very homely matter of stifling the discontent of some members of the Church, who thought that their poor people did not get their fair share of the daily ministration. The second and third of them are parts of the description of the foremost of these seven men, the martyr Stephen. In regard to the first and second of our three fragmentary texts, you will observe that the cause is put first and the effect second. The 'deacons' were to be men 'full of the Holy Ghost,' and that would make them 'full of wisdom.' Stephen was 'full of faith,' and that made him 'full of the Holy Ghost.' Probably the same relation subsists in the third of our texts, of which the true reading is not, as it appears in our Authorised Version, 'full of faith and power,' but as it is given in the Revised Version, 'full of grace and power.' He was filled with grace—by which apparently is here meant the sum of the divine spiritual gifts—and therefore he was full of power. Whether that is so or not, if we link these three passages together, as I have taken the liberty of doing, we get a point of view appropriate for such a day[1] as this, when all that calls itself Christendom is commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit, and His abiding influence upon the Church. So I simply wish to gather together the principles that come out of these three verses thus concatenated.

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[1] Preached on Whit Sunday.

I. We may all, if we will, be full of the Holy Spirit.

If there is a God at all, there is nothing more reasonable than to suppose that He can come into direct contact with the spirits of the men whom He has made. And if that Almighty God is not an Almighty indifference, or a pure devil—if He is love—then there is nothing more certain than that, if He can touch and influence men's hearts towards goodness and His own likeness, He most certainly will.

The probability, which all religion recognises, and in often crude forms tries to set forth, and by superstitious acts to secure, is raised to an absolute certainty, if we believe that Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Truth, speaks truth to us about this matter. For there is nothing more certain than that the characteristic which distinguishes Him from all other teachers, is to be found not only in the fact that He did something for us on the Cross, as well as taught us by His word; but that in His teaching He puts in the forefront, not the prescriptions of our duty, but the promise of God's gift; and ever says to us, 'Open your hearts and the divine influences will flow in and fill you and fit you for all goodness.' The Spirit of God fills the human spirit, as the mysterious influence which we call life permeates and animates the whole body, or as water lies in a cup.

Consider how that metaphor is caught up, and from a different point of view is confirmed, in regard to the completeness which it predicates, by other metaphors of Scripture. What is the meaning of the Baptist's saying, 'He shall baptise you in the Holy Ghost and fire'? Does that not mean a complete immersion in, and submersion under, the cleansing flood? What is the meaning of the Master's own saying, 'Tarry ye . . . till ye be clothed with power from on high'? Does not that mean complete investiture of our nakedness with that heavenly-woven robe? Do not all these emblems declare to us the possibility of a human spirit being charged to the limits of its capacity with a divine influence?

We do not here discuss questions which separate good Christian people from one another in regard of this matter. My object now is not to lay down theological propositions, but to urge upon Christian men the acquirement of an experience which is possible for them. And so. without caring to enter by argument on controversial matters, I desire simply to lay emphasis upon the plain implication of that word, '*filled* with the Holy Ghost.' Does it mean less than the complete subjugation of a man's spirit by the influence of God's Spirit brooding upon him, as the prophet laid himself on the dead child, lip to lip, face to face, beating heart to still heart, limb to limb, and so diffused a supernatural life into the dead? That is an emblem of what all you Christian people may have if you like, and if you will adopt the discipline and observe the conditions which God has plainly laid down.

That fulness will be a growing fulness, for our spirits are capable, if not of infinite, at any rate of indefinite, expansion, and there is no limit known to us, and no limit, I suppose, which will ever be reached, so that we can go no further—to the possible growth of a created spirit that is in touch with God, and is having itself enlarged and elevated and ennobled by that contact. The vessel is elastic, the walls of the cup of our spirit, into which the new wine of the divine Spirit is poured, widen out as the draught is poured into them. The more a man possesses and uses of the life of God, the more is he capable of possessing and the more he will receive. So a continuous expansion in capacity, and a continuous increase in the amount of the divine life possessed, are held out as the happy prerogative and possibility of a Christian soul.

This Stephen had but a very small amount of the clear Christian knowledge that you and I have, but he was leagues ahead of most Christian people in regard to this, that he was 'filled with the Holy Spirit.' Brethren, you can have as much of that Spirit as you want. It is my own fault if my Christian life is not what the Christian lives of some of us, I doubt not, are. 'Filled with the Holy Spirit'! rather a little drop in the bottom of the cup, and all the rest gaping emptiness; rather the fire died down, Pentecostal fire though it be, until there is scarcely anything but a heap of black cinders and grey ashes in your grate, and a little sandwich of flickering flame in one corner; rather the rushing mighty wind died down into all but a dead calm, like that which afflicts sailing-ships in the equatorial regions, when the thick air is deadly still, and the empty sails have not strength even to flap upon the masts; rather the 'river of the water of life' that pours 'out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb,' dried up into a driblet.

That is the condition of many Christian people. I say not of which of us. Let each man settle for himself how that may be. At all events here is the possibility, which may be realised with increasing completeness all through a Christian man's life. We may be filled with the Holy Spirit.

II. If we are 'full of faith' we shall be filled with the Spirit.

That is the condition as suggested by one of our texts—'a man full of faith,' and therefore 'of the Holy Ghost.' Now, of course, I believe, as I suppose all people who have made any experience of their own hearts must believe, that before a soul exercises confidence in Jesus Christ, and passes into the household of faith, there have been playing upon it the influences of that divine Comforter whose first mission is to 'convince the world of sin.' But between such operations as these, which I believe are universally diffused, wheresoever the Word of God and the message of salvation are proclaimed—between such operations as these, and those to which I now refer, whereby the divine Spirit not only operates upon, but dwells in, a man's heart, and not only brings conviction to the world of sin, there is a wide gulf fixed; and for all the hallowing, sanctifying, illuminating and strength-giving operations of that divine Spirit, the pre-requisite condition is our trust. Jesus Christ taught us so, in more than one utterance, and His Apostle, in commenting on one of the most remarkabl of His sayings on this subject, says, 'This spake He concerning the Holy Spirit which *they that believed* Him were to receive.' Faith is the condition of receiving that divine influence. But what kind of faith? Well, let us put away theological words. If you do not believe that there is any such influence to be got, you will not get it. If you do not want it, you will not get it. If you do not expect it, you will not get it. If professing to believe it, and to wish it, and to look for it, you are behaving yourself in such a way as to show that you do not really desire it, you will never get it. It is all very well to talk about faith as the condition of receiving that divine Spirit. Do not let us lose ourselves in the word, but try to translate the somewhat threadbare expression, which by reason of its familiarity produces little effect upon some of us, and to turn it into non-theological English. It just comes to this,—if we are simply trusting ourselves to Jesus Christ our Lord, and if in that trust we do believe in the possibility of even *our* being filled with the divine Spirit, and if that possibility lights up a leaping flame of desire in our hearts which aspires towards the possession of such a gift, and if belief that our reception of that gift is possible because we trust ourselves to Jesus Christ, and longing that we may receive it, combine to produce the confident expectation that we shall, and if all of these combine to produce conduct which neither quenches nor grieves that divine Guest, then, and only then, shall we indeed be filled with the Spirit.

I know of no other way by which a man can receive God into his heart than by opening his heart for God to come in. I know of no other way by which a man can woo—if I may so say—the Divine Lover to enter into his spirit than by longing that He would come, waiting for His coming, expecting it, and being supremely blessed in the thought that such a union is possible. Faith, that is trust, with its appropriate and necessary sequels of desire and expectation and obedience, is the completing of the electric circuit, and after it the spark is sure to come. It is the opening of the windows, after which sunshine cannot but flood the chamber. It is the stretching out of the hand, and no man that ever, with love and longing, lifted an empty hand to God, dropped it still empty. And no man who, with penitence for his own act, and trust in the divine act, lifted blood-stained and foul hands to God, ever held them up there without the gory patches melting away, and becoming white as snow. Not 'all the perfumes of Araby' can sweeten those bloody hands. Lift them up to God, and they become pure. Whosoever wishes that he may, and believes that he shall, receive from Christ the fulness of the Spirit, will not be disappointed. Brethren, 'Ye have not because ye ask not.' 'If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children,' shall not 'your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?'

III. Lastly, if we are filled with the Spirit we shall be 'full of wisdom, grace, and power.'

The Apostles seemed to think that it was a very important business to look after a handful of poor widows, and see that they had their fair share in the dispensing of the modest charity of the half-pauper Jerusalem church, when they said that for such a purely secular thing as that a man would need to be 'full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.' Surely, something a little less august might have served their turn to qualify men for such a task! 'Wisdom' here, I suppose, means practical sagacity, common sense, the power of picking out an impostor when she came whining for a dole. Very commonplace virtues!—but the Apostles evidently thought that such everyday operations of the understanding as these were not too secular and commonplace to owe their origin to the communication to men of the fulness of the Holy Spirit.

May we not take a lesson from that, that God's great influences, when they come into a man, do not concern themselves only with great intellectual problems and the like, but that they will operate to make him more fit to do the most secular and the most trivial things that can be put into his hand to do? The Holy Ghost had to fill Stephen before he could hand out loaves and money to the widows in Jerusalem.

And do you not think that your day's work, and your business perplexities, come under the same category? Perhaps the best way to secure understanding of what we ought to do, in regard to very small and secular matters, is to keep ourselves very near to God, with the windows of our hearts opened towards Jerusalem, that all the guidance and light that can come from Him may come into us. Depend upon it, unless we have God's guidance in the trivialities of life, ninety per cent., ay! and more, of our lives will be without God's guidance; because trivialities make up life. And unless my Father in heaven can guide me about what we, very mistakenly, call 'secular' things, and what we very vulgarly call trivial things, His guidance is not worth much. The Holy Ghost will give you wisdom for to-morrow, and all its little cares, as well as for the higher things, of which I am not going to speak now, because they do not come within my text.

'Full of grace,'—that is a wide word, as I take it. If, by our faith, we have brought into our hearts that divine influence, the Spirit of God does not come empty-handed, but He communicates to us whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, whatsoever things are fair and honourable, whatsoever things in the eyes of men are worthy to be praised, and by the tongues of men have been called virtue. These things will all be given to us step by step, not without our own diligent co-operation, by that divine Giver. Effort without faith, and faith without effort, are equally incomplete, and the co-operation of the two is that which is blessed by God.

Then the things which are 'gracious,' that is to say, given by His love, and also gracious in the sense of partaking of the celestial beauty which belongs to all virtue, and to all likeness in character to God, these things will give us a strange, supernatural *power* amongst men. The word is employed in my third text, I presume, in its narrow sense of miracle-working power, but we may fairly widen it to something much more than that. Our Lord once said, when He was speaking about the gift of the Holy Spirit, that there were two stages in its operation. In the first, it availed for the refreshment and the satisfying of the desires of the individual; in the second it became, by the ministration of that individual, a source of blessing to others. He said, 'If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink,' and then, immediately, 'He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.' That is to say, whoever lives in touch with God, having that divine Spirit in his heart, will walk amongst men the wielder of an unmistakable power, and will be able to bear witness to God, and move men's hearts, and draw them to goodness and truth. The only power for Christian service is the power that comes from being clothed with God's Spirit. The only power for self-government is the power that comes from being clothed with God's Spirit. The only power which will keep us in the way that leads to life, and will bring us at last to the rest and the reward, is the power that comes from being clothed with God's Spirit.

I am charged to all who hear me now with this message, Here is a gift offered to you. You cannot pare and batter at your own characters so as to make them what will satisfy your own consciences, still less what will satisfy the just judgment of God; but you can put yourself under the moulding influences of Christ's love. Dear brethren, the one hope for dead humanity, the bones very many and very dry, is that from the four winds there should come the breath of God, and breathe in them, and they shall live, 'an exceeding great army.' Forget all else that I have been saying now, if you like, but take these two sentences to your hearts, and do not rest till they express your own personal experience: If I am to be good I must have God's Spirit within me. If I am to have God's Spirit within me, I must be 'full of faith.'

STEPHEN'S VISION

'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.'—ACTS vii. 56.

I. THE vision of the Son of Man, or the abiding manhood of Jesus.

Stephen's Greek name, and his belonging to the Hellenistic part of the Church, make it probable that he had never seen Jesus during His earthly life. If so, how beautiful that he should thus see and recognise Him! How significant, in any case, is it he should instinctively have taken on his lips that name, 'the Son of Man,' to designate Him whom he saw, through the opened heavens, standing on the right hand of God! We remember that in the same Council-chamber and before the same court, Jesus had lashed the rulers into a paroxysm of fury by declaring, 'Hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power,' and now here is one of His followers, almost, as it were, flinging in their teeth the words which they had called 'blasphemy,' and witnessing that he, at all events, saw their partial fulfilment. They saw only the roof of the chamber, or, if the Council met in the open court of the Temple, the quivering blue of the Syrian sky; but to him the blue was parted, and a brighter light than that of its lustre was flashed upon his inward eye. His words roused them to an even wilder outburst than those of Jesus had set loose, and with yells of fury, and stopping their ears that they might not hear the blasphemy, they flung themselves on him, unresisting, and dragged him to his doom. Their passion is a measure of the preciousness to the Christian consciousness of that which Stephen saw, and said that he saw.

Whatever more the great designation, 'Son of Man,' means, it unmistakably means the embodiment of perfect manhood. Stephen's vision swept into his soul, as on a mighty wave, the fact, overwhelming if it had not been so transcendently strengthening to the sorely bestead prisoner, that the Jesus whom he had trusted unseen, was still the same Jesus that He had been 'in the days of His flesh,' and, with whatever changes, still was 'found in fashion as a man.' He still 'bent on earth a brother's eye.' Whatever He had dropped from Him as He ascended, His manhood had not fallen away, and, whatever changes had taken place in His body so as to fit it for its enthronement in the heavens, all that had knit Him to His humble friends on earth was still His. The bonds that united Him and them had not been snapped by being stretched to span the distance between the Council-chamber and the right hand of God. His sympathy still continued. All that had won their hearts was still in Him, and every tender remembrance of His love and leading was transformed into the assurance of a present possession. He was still the Son of Man.

We are all too apt to feel as if the manhood of Jesus was now but a memory, and, though our creed affirms the contrary, yet our faith has difficulty in realising the full force and blessedness of its affirmations. For the Resurrection and Ascension seem to remove Him from close contact with us, and sometimes we feel as if we stretch out groping fingers into the dark and find no warm human hand to grasp. His exaltation seems to withdraw Him from our brotherhood, and the cloud, though it is a cloud of glory, sometimes seems to hide Him from our sight. The thickening veil of increasing centuries becomes more and more difficult for faith to pierce. What Stephen saw was not for him only but for us all, and its significance becomes more and more precious as we drift further and further away in time from the days of the life of Jesus on earth. More and more do we need to make very visible to ourselves this vision, and to lay on our hearts the strong consolation of gazing steadfastly into heaven and seeing there the Son of Man. So we shall feel that He is all to us that He was to those who companied with Him here. So shall we be more ready to believe that 'this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as He went,' and that till He come, He is knit to us and we to Him, by the bonds of a common manhood.

II. The vision of the Son of Man at the right hand of God, or the glory of the Man Jesus.

We will not discuss curious questions which may be asked in connection with Stephen's vision, such as whether the glorified humanity of Jesus implies His special presence in a locality; but will rather try to grasp its bearings on topics more directly related to more important matters than dim speculations on points concerning which confident affirmations are sure to be wrong. Whether the representation implies locality or not, it is clear that the deepest meaning of the expression 'the right hand of God,' is the energy of His unlimited power, and that, therefore, the deepest meaning of the expression 'to be at His right hand,' is wielding the might of the divine Omnipotence. The vision is but the visible confirmation of Jesus' words, 'All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth.'

It is to be taken into account that Scripture usually represents the Christ as seated at the right hand of God, and that posture, taken in conjunction with that place, indicates the completion of His work, the majestic calm of His repose, like that creative rest, which did not follow the creative work because the Worker was weary, but because He had fulfilled His ideal. God rested because His work was finished, and was 'very good.' So Jesus sits, because He, too, has finished His work on earth. 'When,' and because 'He had by Himself purged our sins, He sat down on the right hand of God.'

Further, that place at the right hand of God certifies that He is the Judge.

Further, it is a blessed vision for His children, as being the sure pledge of their glory.

It is a glorious revelation of the capabilities of sinless human nature.

It makes heaven habitable for us.

'I go to prepare a place for you.' An emigrant does not feel a stranger in new country, if his elder brother has gone before him, and waits to meet him when he lands. The presence of Jesus makes that dim, heavenly state, which is so hard to imagine, and from which we often feel that even its glories repel, or, at least, do not attract, home to those who love Him. To be where He is, and to be as He is—that is heaven.

III. The vision of the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God, or the ever-ready help of the glorified Jesus.

The divergence of the vision from the usual representation of the attitude of Jesus is not the least precious of its elements. Stephen saw Him 'standing,' as if He had risen to His feet to see His servant's need and was preparing to come to his help.

What a rush of new strength for victorious endurance would flood Stephen's soul as he beheld his Lord thus, as it were, starting to His feet in eagerness to watch and to succour! He looks down from amid the glory, and His calm repose does not involve passive indifference to His servant's sufferings. Into it comes full knowledge of all that they bear for Him, and His rest is not the negation of activity on their behalf, but its intensest energy. Just as one of the Gospels ends with a twofold picture, which at first sight seems to draw a sad distinction between the Lord 'received up into heaven and set down at the right hand of God,' and His servants left below, who 'went everywhere, preaching the word,' but of which the two halves are fused together by the next words, 'the Lord also working with them,' so Stephen's vision brought together the glorified Lord and His servant, and filled the martyr's soul with the fact that He not only 'worked,' but suffered with those who suffered for His sake.

That vision is a transient revelation of an eternal fact. Jesus knows and shares in all that affects His servants. He stands in the attitude to help, and He wields the power of God. He is, as the prophet puts it, 'the Arm of the Lord,' and the cry, 'Awake, O Arm of the Lord!' is never unanswered. He helps His servants by actually directing the course of Providence for their sakes. He helps by wielding the forces of nature on their behalf. He 'rebukes kings for their sake, saying, Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm.' He helps by breathing His own life and strength into them. He helps by disclosing to them the vision of Himself. He helps even when, like Stephen, they are apparently left to the murderous hate of their enemies, for what better help could any of His followers get from Him than that He should, as Stephen prayed that He would, receive their spirit, and 'so give His beloved sleep'? Blessed they whose lives are lighted by that Vision, and whose deaths are such a falling on sleep!

THE YOUNG SAUL AND THE AGED PAUL[1]

'... the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.'—ACTS vii. 58.

'... Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.'—PHILEMON 9.

A FAR greater difference than that which was measured by years separated the young Saul from the aged Paul. By years, indeed, the difference was, perhaps, not so great as the words might suggest, for Jewish usage extended the term of youth further than we do, and began age sooner. No doubt, too, Paul's life had aged him fast, and probably there were not thirty years between the two periods. But the difference between him and himself at the beginning and the end of his career was a gulf; and his life was not evolution, but revolution.

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[1] To the young.

At the beginning you see a brilliant young Pharisee, Gamaliel's promising pupil, advanced above many who were his equals in his own religion, as he says himself; living after its straitest sect, and eager to have the smallest part in what seemed to him the righteous slaying of one of the followers of the blaspheming Nazarene. At the end he was himself one of these followers. He had cast off, as folly, the wisdom which took him so much pains to acquire. He had turned his back upon all the brilliant prospects of distinction which were opening to him. He had broken with countrymen and kindred. And what had he made of it? He had been persecuted, hunted, assailed by every weapon that his old companions could fashion or wield; he is a solitary man, laden with many cares, and accustomed to look perils and death in the face; he is a prisoner, and in a year or two more he will be a martyr. If he were an apostate and a renegade, it was not for what he could get by it.

What made the change? The vision of Jesus Christ. If we think of the transformation on Saul, its causes and its outcome, we shall get lessons which I would fain press upon your hearts now. Do you wonder that I would urge on you just such a life as that of this man as your highest good?

I. I would note, then, first, that faith in Jesus Christ will transform and ennoble any life.

It has been customary of late years, amongst people who do not like miracles, and do not believe in sudden changes of character, to allege that Paul's conversion was but the appearance, on the surface, of an underground process that had been going on ever since he kept the witnesses' clothes. Modern critics know a great deal more about the history of Paul's conversion than Paul did. For to him there was no consciousness of undermining, but the change was instantaneous. He left Jerusalem a bitter persecutor, exceeding mad against the followers of the Nazarene, thinking that Jesus was a blasphemer and an impostor, and His disciples pestilent vermin, to be harried off the face of the earth. He entered Damascus a lowly disciple of that Christ. His conversion was not an underground process that had been silently sapping the foundations of his life; it was an explosion. And what caused it? What was it that came on that day on the Damascus road, amid the blinding sunshine of an Eastern noontide? The vision of Jesus Christ. An overwhelming conviction flooded his soul that He whom he had taken to be an impostor, richly deserving the Cross that He endured, was living in glory, and was revealing Himself to Saul then and there. That truth crumbled his whole past into nothing; and he stood there trembling and astonished, like a man the ruins of whose house have fallen about his ears. He bowed himself to the vision. He surrendered at discretion without a struggle. 'Immediately,' says he, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,' and when he said 'Lord, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' he flung open the gates of the fortress for the Conqueror to come in. The vision of Christ reversed his judgments, transformed his character, revolutionised his life.

That initial impulse operated through all the rest of his career. Hearken to him: 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. To me to live is Christ. Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Living or dying, we are the Lord's.' 'We labour that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him.' The transforming agency was the vision of Christ, and the bowing of the man's whole nature before the seen Saviour.

Need I recall to you how noble a life issued from that fountain? I am sure that I need do no more than mention in a word or two the wondrous activity, flashing like a flame of fire from East to West, and everywhere kindling answering flames, the noble self-oblivion, the continual communion with God and the Unseen, and all the other great virtues and nobleness which came from such sources as these. I need only, I am sure, remind you of them, and draw this lesson, that the secret of a transforming and noble life is to be found in faith in Jesus Christ. The vision that changed Paul is as available for you and me. For it is all a mistake to suppose that the essence of it is the miraculous appearance that flashed upon the Apostle's eyes. He speaks of it himself, in one of his letters, in other language, when he says, 'It pleased God to reveal His Son *in* me.' And that revelation in all its fulness, in all its sweetness, in all its transforming and ennobling power, is offered to every one of us. For the eye of faith is no less gifted with the power of direct and certain vision—yea! is even more gifted with this—than is the eye of sense. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.' Christ is revealed to each one of us as really, as veritably, and the revelation may become as strong an impulse and motive in our lives as ever it was to the Apostle on the Damascus road. What is wanted is not revelation, but the bowed will—not the heavenly vision, but obedience to the vision. I suppose that most of you think that you believe all that about Jesus Christ, which transformed Gamaliel's pupil into Christ's disciple. And what has it done for you? In many cases, nothing. Be sure of this, dear young friends, that the shortest way to a life adorned with all grace, with all nobility, fragrant with all goodness, and permanent as that life which does the will of God must clearly be, is this, to bow before the seen Christ, seen in His word, and speaking to your hearts, and to take His yoke and carry His burden. Then you will build upon what will stand, and make your days noble and your lives stable. If you build on anything else, the structure will come down with a crash some day, and bury you in its ruins. Surely it is better to learn the worthlessness of a non-Christian life, in the light of His merciful face, when there is yet time to change our course, than to see it by the fierce light of the great White Throne set for judgment. We must each of us learn it here or there.

II. Faith in Christ will make a joyful life, whatever its circumstances.

I have said that, judged by the standard of the Exchange, or by any of the standards which men usually apply to success in life, this life of the Apostle was a failure. We know, without my dwelling more largely upon it, what he gave up. We know what, to outward appearance, he gained by his Christianity. You remember, perhaps, how he himself speaks about the external aspects of his life in one place, where he says, 'Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place, and labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world, and as the offscouring of all things unto this day.'

That was one side of it. Was that all? This man had that within him which enabled him to triumph over all trials. There is nothing more remarkable about him than the undaunted courage, the unimpaired elasticity of spirit, the buoyancy of gladness, which bore him high upon the waves of the troubled sea in which he had to swim. If ever there was a man that had a bright light burning within him, in the deepest darkness, it was that little weather-beaten Jew, whose 'bodily presence was weak, and his speech contemptible.' And what was it that made him master of circumstances, and enabled him to keep sunshine in his heart when winter bound all the world around him? What made this bird sing in a darkened cage? One thing—the continual presence, consciously with Him by faith, of that Christ who had revolutionised his life, and who continued to bless and to gladden it. I have quoted his description of his external condition. Let me quote two or three words that indicate how he took all that sea of troubles and of sorrows that poured its waves and its billows over him. 'In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.' 'As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth also by Christ.' 'For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet our inward man is renewed day by day.' 'Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.' 'I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.' 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things.'

There is the secret of blessedness, my friends; there is the fountain of perpetual joy. Cling to Christ, set His will on the throne of your hearts, give the reins of your life and of your character into His keeping, and nothing 'that is at enmity with joy' can either 'abolish or destroy' the calm blessedness of your spirits.

You will have much to suffer; you will have something to give up. Your life may look, to men whose tastes have been vulgarised by the glaring brightnesses of this vulgar world, but grey and sombre, but it will have in it the calm abiding blessedness which is more than joy, and is diviner and more precious than the tumultuous transports of gratified sense or successful ambition. Christ is peace, and He gives His peace to us; and then He gives a joy which does not break but enhances peace. We are all tempted to look for our gladness in creatures, each of which satisfies but a part of our desire. But no man can be truly blessed who has to find many contributories to make up his blessedness. That which makes us rich must be, not a multitude of precious stones, howsoever precious they may be, but one Pearl of great price; the one Christ who is our only joy. And He says to us that He gives us Himself, if we behold Him and bow to Him, that His joy might remain in us, and that our joy might be full, while all other gladnesses are partial and transitory. Faith in Christ makes life blessed. The writer of Ecclesiastes asked the question which the world has been asking ever since: 'Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of this vain life which he passeth as a shadow?' You young people are asking, 'Who will show us any good?' Here is the answer—Faith in Christ and obedience to Him; that is the good part which no man taketh from us. Dear young friend, have you made it yours?

III. Faith in Christ produces a life which bears being looked back upon.

In a later Epistle than that from which my second text is taken, we get one of the most lovely pictures that was ever drawn, albeit it is unconsciously drawn, of a calm old age, very near the gate of death; and looking back with a quiet heart over all the path of life. I am not going to preach to you, dear friends, in the flush of your early youth, a gospel which is only to be recommended because it is good to die by, but it will do even you, at the beginning, no harm to realise for a moment that the end will come, and that retrospect will take the place in your lives which hope and anticipation fill now. And I ask you what you expect to feel and say then?

What did Paul say? 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.' He was not self-righteous; but it is possible to have lived a life which, as the world begins to fade, vindicates itself as having been absolutely right in its main trend, and to feel that the dawning light of Eternity confirms the choice that we made. And I pray you to ask yourselves, 'Is my life of that sort?'

How much of it would bear the scrutiny which will have to come, and which in Paul's case was so quiet and calm? He had had a stormy day, many a thunder-cloud had darkened the sky, many a tempest had swept across the plain; but now, as the evening draws on, the whole West is filled with a calm amber light, and all across the plain, right away to the grey East, he sees that he has been led by, and has been willing to walk in, the right way to the 'City of habitation.' Would that be your experience if the last moment came now?

There will be, for the best of us, much sense of failure and shortcoming when we look back on our lives. But whilst some of us will have to say, 'I have played the fool and erred exceedingly,' it is possible for each of us to lay himself down in peace and sleep, awaiting a glorious rising again and a crown of righteousness.

Dear young friends, it is for you to choose whether your past, when you summon it up before you, will look like a wasted wilderness, or like a garden of the Lord. And though, as I have said, there will always be much sense of failure and shortcoming, yet that need not disturb the calm retrospect; for whilst memory sees the sins, faith can grasp the Saviour, and quietly take leave of life, saying, 'I know in whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.'

So I press upon you all this one truth, that faith in Jesus Christ will transform, will ennoble, will make joyous your lives whilst you live, and will give you a quiet heart in the retrospect when you come to die. Begin right, dear young friends. You will never find it so easy to take any decisive step, and most of all this chiefest step, as you do to-day. You will get less and less flexible as you get older. You will get set in your ways. Habits will twine their tendrils round you, and hinder your free movement. The truth of the Gospel will become commonplace by familiarity. Associations and companions will have more and more power over you; and you will be stiffened as an old tree-trunk is stiffened. You cannot count on to-morrow; be wise to-day. Begin this year aright. Why should you not now see the Christ and welcome Him? I pray that every one of us may behold Him and fall before Him with the cry, 'Lord! what wilt Thou have me to do?'

THE DEATH OF THE MASTER AND THE DEATH OF THE SERVANT

'And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And, when he had said this, he fell asleep.'—ACTS vii. 59, 60.

THIS is the only narrative in the New Testament of a Christian martyrdom or death. As a rule, Scripture is supremely indifferent to what becomes of the people with whom it is for a time concerned. As long as the man is the organ of the divine Spirit he is somewhat; as soon as that ceases to speak through him he drops into insignificance. So this same Acts of the Apostles—if I may so say—kills off James the brother of John in a parenthesis; and his is the only other martyrdom that it concerns itself even so much as to mention.

Why, then, this exceptional detail about the martyrdom of Stephen? For two reasons: because it is the first of a series, and the Acts of the Apostles always dilates upon the first of each set of things which it describes, and condenses about the others. But more especially, I think, because if we come to look at the story, it is not so much an account of Stephen's death as of Christ's power in Stephen's death. And the theme of this book is not the acts of the Apostles, but the acts of the risen Lord, in and for His Church.

There is no doubt but that this narrative is modelled upon the story of our Lord's Crucifixion, and the two incidents, in their similarities and in their differences, throw a flood of light upon one another.

I shall therefore look at our subject now with constant reference to that other greater death upon which it is based. It is to be observed that the two sayings on the lips of the proto-martyr Stephen are recorded for us in their original form on the lips of Christ, in *Luke's* Gospel, which makes a still further link of connection between the two narratives.

So, then, my purpose now is merely to take this incident as it lies before us, to trace in it the analogies and the differences between the death of the Master and the death of the servant, and to draw from it some thoughts as to what it is possible for a Christian's death to become, when Christ's presence is felt in it.

I. Consider, in general terms, this death as the last act of imitation to Christ.

The resemblance between our Lord's last moments and Stephen's has been thought to have been the work of the narrator, and, consequently, to cast some suspicion upon the veracity of the narrative. I accept the correspondence, I believe it was intentional, but I shift the intention from the writer to the actor, and I ask why it should not have been that the dying martyr should consciously, and of set purpose, have made his death conformable to his Master's death? Why should not the dying martyr have sought to put himself (as the legend tells one of the other Apostles in outward form sought to do) in Christ's attitude, and to die as He died?

Remember, that in all probability Stephen died on Calvary. It was the ordinary place of execution, and, as many of you may know, recent investigations have led many to conclude that a little rounded knoll outside the city wall—not a 'green hill,' but still 'outside a city wall,' and which still bears a lingering tradition of connection with Him—was probably the site of that stupendous event. It was the place of stoning, or of public execution, and there in all probability, on the very ground where Christ's Cross was fixed, His first martyr saw 'the heavens opened and Christ standing on the right hand of God.' If these were the associations of the place, what more natural, and even if they were not, what more natural, than that the martyr's death should be shaped after his Lord's?

Is it not one of the great blessings, in some sense the greatest of the blessings, which we owe to the Gospel, that in that awful solitude where no other example is of any use to us, His pattern may still gleam before us? Is it not something to feel that as life reaches its highest, most poignant and exquisite delight and beauty in the measure in which it is made an imitation of Jesus, so for each of us death may lose its most poignant and exquisite sting and sorrow, and become something almost sweet, if it be shaped after the pattern and by the power of His? We travel over a lonely waste at last. All clasped hands are unclasped:

and we set out on the solitary, though it be 'the common, road into the great darkness.' But, blessed be His Name! 'the Breaker is gone up before us,' and across the waste there are footprints that we

'Seeing, may take heart again.'

The very climax and apex of the Christian imitation of Christ may be that we shall bear the image of His death, and be like Him then.

Is it not a strange thing that generations of martyrs have gone to the stake with their hearts calm and their spirits made constant by the remembrance of that Calvary where Jesus died with more of trembling reluctance, shrinking, and apparent bewildered unmanning than many of the weakest of His followers? Is it not a strange thing that the death which has thus been the source of composure, and strength, and heroism to thousands, and has lost none of its power of being so to-day, was the death of a Man who shrank from the bitter cup, and that cried in that mysterious darkness, 'My God! Why hast Thou forsaken Me?'

Dear brethren, unless with one explanation of the reason for His shrinking and agony, Christ's death is less heroic than that of some other martyrs, who yet drew all their courage from Him.

How come there to be in Him, at one moment, calmness unmoved, and heroic self-oblivion, and at the next, agony, and all but despair? I know only one explanation, 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' And when He died, shrinking and trembling, and feeling bewildered and forsaken, it was your sins and mine that weighed Him down. The servant whose death was conformed to his Master's had none of these experiences because he was only a martyr.

The Lord had them, because He was the Sacrifice for the whole world.

II. We have here, next, a Christian's death as being the voluntary entrusting of the spirit to Christ.

'They stoned Stephen.' Now, our ordinary English idea of the manner of the Jewish punishment of stoning, is a very inadequate and mistaken one. It did not consist merely in a miscellaneous rabble throwing stones at the criminal, but there was a solemn and appointed method of execution which is preserved for us in detail in the Rabbinical books. And from it we gather that the *modus operandi* was this. The blasphemer was taken to a certain precipitous rock, the height of which was prescribed as being equal to that of two men. The witnesses by whose testimony he had been condemned had to cast him over, and if he survived the fall it was their task to roll upon him a great stone, of which the weight is prescribed in the Talmud as being as much as two men could lift. If he lived after that, then others took part in the punishment.

Now, at some point in that ghastly tragedy, probably, we may suppose as they were hurling him over the rock, the martyr lifts his voice in this prayer of our text.

As they were stoning him he 'called upon'—not *God*, as our Authorised Version has supplied the wanting word, but, as is obvious from the context and from the remembrance of the vision, and from the language of the following supplication, 'called upon *Jesus*, saying, Lord Jesus! receive my spirit.'

I do not dwell at any length upon the fact that here we have a distinct instance of prayer to Jesus Christ, a distinct recognition, in the early days of His Church, of the highest conceptions of His person and nature, so as that a dying man turns to Him, and commits his soul into His hands. Passing this by, I ask you to think of the resemblance, and the difference, between this intrusting of the spirit by Stephen to his Lord, and the committing of His spirit to the Father by His dying Son. Christ on the Cross speaks to God; Stephen, on Calvary, speaks, as I suppose, to Jesus Christ. Christ, on the Cross, says, 'I commit.' Stephen says, 'Receive,' or rather, 'Take.' The one phrase carries in it something of the notion that our Lord died not because He must, but because He would; that He was active in His death; that He chose to summon death to do its work upon Him; that He 'yielded up His spirit,' as one of the Evangelists has it, pregnantly and significantly. But Stephen says, 'Take!' as knowing that it must be his Lord's power that should draw his spirit out of the coil of horror around him. So the one dying word has strangely compacted in it authority and submission; and the other dying word is the word of a simple waiting servant. The Christ says, 'I commit.' 'I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again.' Stephen says, 'Take my spirit,' as longing to be away from the weariness and the sorrow and the pain and all the hell of hatred that was seething and boiling round about him, but yet knowing that he had to wait the Master's will.

So from the language I gather large truths, truths which unquestionably were not present to the mind of the dying man, but are all the more conspicuous because they were unconsciously expressed by him, as to the resemblance and the difference between the death of the martyr, done to death by cruel hands, and the death of the atoning Sacrifice who gave Himself up to die for our sins.

Here we have, in this dying cry, the recognition of Christ as the Lord of life and death. Here we have the voluntary and submissive surrender of the spirit to Him. So, in a very real sense, the martyr's death becomes a sacrifice, and he too dies not merely because he must, but he accepts the necessity, and finds blessedness in it. We need not be passive in death; we need not, when it comes to our turn to die, cling desperately to the last vanishing skirts of life. We may yield up our being, and pour it out as a libation; as the Apostle has it, 'If I be offered as a drink-offering upon the sacrifice of your faith, I joy and rejoice.' Oh! brethren, to die *like* Christ, to die yielding oneself to Him!

And then in these words there is further contained the thought coming gleaming out like a flash of light into some murky landscape—of passing into perennial union with Him. 'Take my spirit,' says the dying man; 'that is all I want. I see Thee standing at the right hand. For what hast Thou started to Thy feet, from the eternal repose of Thy session at the right hand of God the Father Almighty? To help and succour me. And dost Thou succour me when Thou dost let these cruel hands cast me from the rock and bruise me with heavy stones? Yes, Thou dost. For the highest form of Thy help is to take my spirit, and to let me be with Thee.'

Christ delivers His servant from death when He leads the servant into and through death. Brothers, can you look forward thus, and trust yourselves, living or dying, to that Master who is near us amidst the coil of human troubles and sorrows, and sweetly draws our spirits, as a mother her child to her bosom, into His own arms when He sends us death? Is that what it will be to you?

III. Then, still further, there are other words here which remind us of the final triumph of an all-forbearing charity.

Stephen had been cast from the rock, had been struck with the heavy stone. Bruised and wounded by it, he strangely survives, strangely somehow or other struggles to his knees even though desperately wounded, and, gathering all his powers together at the impulse of an undying love, prays his last words and cries, 'Lord Jesus! Lay not this sin to their charge!'

It is an echo, as I have been saying, of other words, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' An echo, and yet an independent tone! The one cries 'Father!' the other invokes the 'Lord.' The one says, 'They know not what they do'; the other never thinks of reading men's motives, of apportioning their criminality, of discovering the secrets of their hearts. It was fitting that the Christ, before whom all these blind instruments of a mighty design stood patent and naked to their deepest depths, should say, 'They know not what they do.' It would have been unfitting that the servant, who knew no more of his fellows' heart than could be guessed from their actions, should have offered such a plea in his prayer for their forgiveness.

In the very humiliation of the Cross, Christ speaks as knowing the hidden depths of men's souls, and therefore fitted to be their Judge, and now His servant's prayer is addressed to Him as actually being so.

Somehow or other, within a very few years of the time when our Lord dies, the Church has come to the distinctest recognition of *His* Divinity to whom the martyr prays; to the distinctest recognition of *Him* as the Lord of life and death whom the martyr asks to take his spirit, and to the clearest perception of the fact that He is the Judge of the whole earth by whose acquittal men shall be acquitted, and by whose condemnation they shall be condemned.

Stephen knew that Christ was the Judge. He knew that in two minutes he would be standing at Christ's judgment bar. His prayer was not, 'Lay not my sins to my charge,' but 'Lay not this sin to their charge.' Why did he not ask forgiveness for himself? Why was he not thinking about the judgment that he was going to meet so soon? He had done all that long ago. He had no fear about that judgment for himself, and so when the last hour struck, he was at leisure of heart and mind to pray for his persecutors, and to think of his Judge without a tremor. Are you? If you were as near the edge as Stephen was, would it be wise for you to be interceding for other people's forgiveness? The answer to that question is the answer to this other one,—have you sought your pardon already, and got it at the hands of Jesus Christ?

IV. One word is all that I need say about the last point of analogy and contrast here—the serene passage into rest: 'When he had said this he fell asleep.'

The New Testament scarcely ever speaks of a Christian's death as death but as sleep, and with other similar phrases. But that expression, familiar and all but universal as it is in the Epistles, in reference to the death of believers, is never in a single instance employed in reference to the death of Jesus Christ. He did die that you and I may live. His death was death indeed—He endured not merely the physical fact, but that which is its sting, the consciousness of sin. And He died that the sting might be blunted, and all its poison exhausted upon Him. So the ugly thing is sleeked and smoothed; and the foul form changes into the sweet semblance of a sleep-bringing angel. Death is gone. The physical fact remains, but all the misery of it, the essential bitterness and the poison of it is all sucked out of it, and it is turned into 'he fell asleep,' as a tired child on its mother's lap, as a weary man after long toil.

> 'Thou thy worldly task hast done,
> Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages.'

Death is but sleep now, because Christ has died, and that sleep is restful, conscious, perfect life.

Look at these two pictures, the agony of the one, the calm triumph of the other, and see that the martyr's falling asleep was possible because the Christ had died before. And do you commit the keeping of your souls to Him now, by true faith; and then, living you may have Him with you, and, dying, a vision of His presence bending down to succour and to save, and when you are dead, a life of rest conjoined with intensest activity. To sleep in Jesus is to awake in His likeness, and to be satisfied.

SEED SCATTERED AND TAKING ROOT

'And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judæa and Samaria, except the apostles. 2. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. 4. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. 5. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8. And there was great joy in that city. 9. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10. To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. 11. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 12. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. 14. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15. Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16. (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17. Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.'—ACTS viii. 1-17.

THE note of time in verse 1 is probably to be rendered as in the Revised Version, 'on that day.' The appetite for blood roused by Stephen's martyrdom at once sought for further victims. Thus far the persecutors had been the rulers, and the persecuted the Church's leaders; but now the populace are the hunters, and the whole Church the prey. The change marks an epoch. Luke does not care to make much of the persecution, which is important to him chiefly for its bearing on the spread of the Church's message. It helped to diffuse the Gospel, and that is why he tells of it. But before proceeding to narrate how it did so, he gives us a picture of things as they stood at the beginning of the assault.

Three points are noted: the flight of the Church except the Apostles, the funeral of Stephen, and Saul's eager search for the disciples. We need not press 'all,' as if it were to be taken with mathematical accuracy. Some others besides the Apostles may have remained, but the community was broken up. They fled, as Christ had bid them do, if persecuted in one city. Brave faithfulness goes with prudent self-preservation, and a valuable 'part of valour is discretion.' But the disciples who fled were not necessarily less courageous than the Apostles who remained, nor were the latter less prudent than the brethren who fled. For *noblesse oblige*; high position demands high virtues, and the officers should be the last to leave a wreck. The Apostles, no doubt, felt it right to hold together, and preserve a centre to which the others might return when the storm had blown itself out.

In remarkable contrast with the scattering Church are the 'devout men' who reverently buried the martyr. They were not disciples, but probably Hellenistic Jews (Acts ii. 5); perhaps from the synagogue whose members had disputed with Stephen and had dragged him to the council. His words or death may have touched them, as many a time the martyr's fire has lighted others to the martyr's faith. Stephen was like Jesus in his burial by non-disciples, as he had been in his death.

The eager zeal of the young Pharisee brought new severity into the persecution, in his hunting out his victims in their homes, and in his including women among his prisoners. There is nothing so cruel as so-called religious zeal. So Luke lifts the curtain for a moment, and in that glimpse of the whirling tumult of the city we see the three classes, of the brave and prudent disciples, ready to flee or to stand and suffer as duty called; the good men who shrunk from complicity with a bloodthirsty mob, and were stirred to sympathy with his victims; and the zealot, who with headlong rage hated his brother for the love of God. But the curtain drops, and Luke turns to his true theme. He picks up the threads again in verse 4, telling of the dispersal of the disciples, with the significant addition of their occupation when scattered,—'preaching the word.'

The violent hand of the persecutor acted as the scattering hand of the sower. It flung the seeds broadcast, and wherever they fell they sprouted. These fugitives were not officials, nor were they commissioned by the Apostles to preach. Without any special command or position, they followed the instincts of believing hearts, and, as they carried their faith with them, they spoke of it wherever they found themselves. A Christian will be impelled to speak of Christ if his personal hold of Him is vital. He should need no ecclesiastical authorisation for that. It is not every believer's duty to get into a pulpit, but it *is* his duty to 'preach Christ.' The scattering of the disciples was meant by men to put out the fire, but, by Christ, to spread it. A volcanic explosion flings burning matter over a wide area.

Luke takes up one of the lines of expansion, in his narrative of Philip's doings in Samaria, which he puts first because Jesus had indicated Samaria first among the regions beyond Judæa (i. 8). Philip's name comes second in the list of deacons (vi. 5), probably in anticipation of his work in Samaria. How unlike the forecast by the Apostles was the actual course of things! They had destined the seven for purely 'secular' work, and regarded preaching the word as their own special engagement. But Stephen saw and proclaimed more clearly than they did the passing away of Temple and ritual; and Philip, on his own initiative, and apparently quite unconscious of the great stride forward that he was taking, was the first to carry the gospel torch into the regions beyond. The Church made Philip a 'deacon,' but Christ made him an 'evangelist'; and an evangelist he continued, long after he had ceased to be a deacon in Jerusalem (xxi. 8).

Observe, too, that, as soon as Stephen is taken away, Philip rises up to take his place. The noble army of witnesses never wants recruits. Its Captain sends men to the front in unbroken succession, and they are willing to occupy posts of danger because He bids them. Probably Philip fled to Samaria for convenience' sake, but, being there, he probably recalled Christ's instructions in chapter i. 8, repealing His prohibition in Matthew x. 5. What a different world it would be, if it was true of Christians now that they 'went down into the city of So-and-So and proclaimed Christ'! Many run to and fro, but some of them leave their Christianity at home, or lock it up safely in their travelling trunks.

Jerusalem had just expelled the disciples, and would fain have crushed the Gospel; despised Samaria received it with joy. 'A foolish nation' was setting Israel an example (Deut. xxxii. 21; Rom. x. 19). The Samaritan woman had a more spiritual conception of the Messiah than the run of Jews had, and her countrymen seem to have been ready to receive the word. Is not the faith of our mission converts often a rebuke to us?

But the Gospel met new foes as well as new friends on the new soil. Simon the sorcerer, probably a Jew or a Samaritan, would have been impossible on Jewish ground, but was a characteristic product of that age in the other parts of the Roman empire. Just as, to-day, people who are weary of Christianity are playing with Buddhism, it was fashionable in that day of unrest to trifle with Eastern magic-mongers; and, of course, demand created supply, and where there was a crowd of willing dupes, there soon came to be a crop of profit-seeking deceivers. Very characteristically, the dupes claimed more for the deceiver than he did for himself. He probably could perform some simple chemical experiments and conjuring tricks, and had a store of what sounded to ignorant people profound teaching about deep mysteries, and gave forth enigmatical utterances about his own greatness. An accomplished charlatan will leave much to be inferred from nods and hints, and his admirers will generally spin even more out of them than he meant. So the Samaritans bettered Simon's 'some great one' into 'that power of God which is called great,' and saw in him some kind of emanation of divinity.

The quack is great till the true teacher comes, and then he dwindles. Simon had a bitter pill to swallow when he saw this new man stealing his audience, and doing things which he, with his sorceries, knew that he only pretended to do. Luke points very clearly to the likeness and difference between Simon and Philip by using the same word ('gave heed') in regard to the Samaritan's attitude to both, while in reference to Philip it was 'the things spoken by' him, and in reference to Simon it was himself to which they attended. The one preached Christ, the other himself; the one 'amazed' with 'sorceries,' the other brought good tidings and hid himself, and his message called, not for stupid, open-mouthed astonishment, but for belief and obedience to the name of Jesus. The whole difference between the religion of Jesus and the superstitions which the world calls religions, is involved in the significant contrast, so inartificially drawn.

'Simon also himself believed.' Probably there was in his action a good deal of swimming with the stream, in the hope of being able to divert it; but, also, he may have been all the more struck by Philip's miracles, because he knew a real one, by reason of his experience of sham ones. At any rate, neither Philip nor

Luke drew a distinction between his belief and that of the Samaritans; and, as in their cases, his baptism followed on his profession of belief. But he seems not to have got beyond the point of wondering at the miracles, as it is emphatically said that he did even after his baptism. He believed that Jesus was the Messiah, but was more interested in studying Philip to find out how he did the miracles than in listening to his teaching. Such an imperfect belief had no transforming power, and left him the same man as before, as was soon miserably manifest.

The news of Philip's great step forward reached the Apostles by some unrecorded means. It is not stated that Philip reported his action, as if to superiors whose authorisation was necessary. More probably the information filtered through other channels. At all events, sending a deputation was natural, and needs not to be regarded as either a sign of suspicion or an act necessary in order to supplement imperfections inherent in the fact that Philip was not an Apostle. The latter meaning has been read—not to say forced—into the incident; but Luke's language does not support it. It was not because they thought that the Samaritans were not admissible to the full privileges of Christians without Apostolic acts, but because they 'heard that Samaria had received the word,' that the Apostles sent Peter and John.

The Samaritans had not yet received the Holy Ghost—that is, the special gifts, such as those of Pentecost. That fact proves that baptism is not necessarily and inseparably connected with the gift of the Spirit; and chapter x. 44, 47, proves that the Spirit may be given before baptism. As little does this incident prove that the imposition of Apostolic hands was necessary in order to the impartation of the Spirit. Luke, at any rate, did not think so; for he tells how Ananias' hand laid on the blind Saul conveyed the gift to him. The laying on of hands is a natural, eloquent symbol, but it was no prerogative of the Apostles (Acts x. 17; 1 Tim. iv. 14).

The Apostles came down to Samaria to rejoice in the work which their Lord had commanded, and which had been begun without their help, to welcome the new brethren, to give them further instruction, and to knit closely the bonds of unity between the new converts and the earlier ones. But that they came to bestow spiritual gifts which, without them, could not have been imparted, is imported into, not deduced from, the simple narrative of Luke.

SIMON THE SORCERER

'Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.'—Acts viii. 21.

The era of the birth of Christianity was one of fermenting opinion and decaying faith. Then, as now, men's minds were seething and unsettled, and that unrest which is the precursor of great changes in intellectual and spiritual habitudes affected the civilised world. Such a period is ever one of predisposition to superstition. The one true bond which unites God and man being obscured, and to the consciousness of many snapped, men's minds become the prey of visionary terrors. Demand creates supply, and the magician and miracle-worker, the possessor of mysterious ways into the Unknown, is never far off at such a time. Partly deceived and partly deceiving, he is as sure a sign of the lack of profound religious conviction and of the presence of unsatisfied religious aspirations in men's souls, as the stormy petrel or the floating seaweed is of a tempest on the seas.

So we find the early preachers of Christianity coming into frequent contact with pretenders to magical powers. Sadly enough, they were mostly Jews, who prostituted their clearer knowledge to personal ends, and having tacked on to it some theosophic rubbish which they had learned from Alexandria, or mysticism which had filtered to them from the East, or magic arts from Phrygia, went forth, the only missionaries that Judaism sent out, to bewilder and torture men's minds. What a fall from Israel's destination, and what a lesson for the stewards of the 'oracles of God'!

Of such a sort were Elymas, the sorcerer whom Paul found squatting at the ear of the Roman Governor of Cyprus; the magicians at Ephesus; the vagabond Jews exorcists, who with profitable eclecticism, as they thought, tried to add the name of Jesus as one more spell to their conjurations; and, finally, this Simon the sorcerer. Established in Samaria, he had been juggling and conjuring and seeing visions, and professing to be a great mysterious personality, and had more than permitted the half-heathen Samaritans, who seem to have had more religious susceptibility and less religious knowledge than the Jews, and so were a prepared field for all such pretenders, to think of him as in some sense an incarnation of God, and perhaps to set him up as a rival or caricature of Him who in the neighbouring Judæa was being spoken of as the power of God, God manifest in the flesh.

To the city thus moved comes no Apostle, but a

Christian man who begins to preach, and by miracles and teaching draws many souls to Christ.

The story of Simon Magus in his attitude to the Gospel is a very striking and instructive one. It presents for our purpose now mainly three points to which I proceed to refer.

I. An instance of a wholly unreal, because inoperative, faith.

'He believed,' says the narrative, and believing was baptized. It is worth noting, in passing, how the profession of faith without anything more was considered by the Early Church sufficient. But obviously his was no true faith. The event showed that it was not.

What was it which made his faith thus unreal?

It rested wholly on the miracles and signs; he 'wondered' when he saw them. Of course, miracles were meant to lead to faith; but if they did not lead on to a deeper sense of one's own evil and need, and so to a spiritual apprehension, then they were of no use.

The very beginning of the story points to the one bond that unites to God, as being the sense of need and the acceptance with heart and will of the testimony of Jesus Christ. Such a disposition is shown in the Samaritans, who make a contrast with Simon in that they believed Philip *preaching*, while Simon believed him *working miracles*. The true place of miracles is to attract attention, to prepare to listen to the word. They are only introductory. A faith may be founded on them, but, on the other hand, the impressions which they produce may be evanescent. How subordinate then, their place at the most! And the one thing which avails is a living contact of heart and soul with Jesus Christ.

Again, Simon's belief was purely an affair of the understanding. We are not to suppose, I think, that he merely believed in Philip as a miracle-worker; he must have had some notion about Philip's Master, and we know that it was belief in Jesus as the Christ that qualified in the Apostolic age for baptism. So it is reasonable to suppose that he had so much of head knowledge. But it was only head knowledge. There was in it no penitence, no self-abandonment, no fruit in holy desires; or in other words, there was no heart. It was credence, but not trust.

Now it does not matter how much or how little you know about Jesus Christ. It does not matter how you have come to that knowledge. It does not matter though you have received Christian ordinances as Simon had. If your faith is not a living power, leading to love and self-surrender, it is really nought. And here, on its earliest conflict with heathen magic, the gospel proclaims by the mouth of the Apostle what is true as to all formalists and nominal Christians: 'Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter, *for* thy heart is not right.' One thing only unites to God—a faith which cleanses the heart, a faith which lays hold on Christ with will and conscience, a faith which, resting on penitent acknowledgment of sin, trusts wholly to His great mercy.

II. An instance of the constant tendency to corrupt Christianity with heathen superstition.

The Apostles' bestowal of the Holy Ghost, which was evidently accompanied by visible signs, had excited Simon's desire for so useful an aid to his conjuring, and he offers to buy the power, judging of them by himself, and betraying that what he was ready to buy he was also intending to sell.

The offer to buy has been taken as his great sin.

Surely it was but the outcome of a greater. It was not only what he offered, but what he desired, that was wrong. He wanted that on 'whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.' That preposterous wish was quite as bad as, and was the root of, his absurd offer to bribe Peter. Bribe Peter, indeed! Some of Peter's successors would have been amenable to such considerations, but not the horny-handed fisherman who had once said, 'Silver and gold have I none.'

Peter's answer, especially the words of my text, puts the Christian principle in sharp antagonism to the heathen one.

Simon regards what is sacred and spiritual purely as part of his stock-in-trade, contributing to his prestige. He offers to buy it. And the foundation of all his errors is that he regards spiritual gifts as capable of being received and exercised apart altogether from moral qualifications. He does not think at all of what is involved in the very name, 'the Holy Ghost.'

Now, on the other hand, Peter's answer lays down broadly and sharply the opposite truth, the Christian principle that a heart right in the sight of God is the indispensable qualification for all possession of spiritual power, or of any of the blessings which Jesus gives.

How the heart is made right, and what constitutes righteousness is another matter. That leads to the doctrine of repentance and faith.

The one thing that makes such participation impossible is being and continuing in 'the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity.' Or, to put it into more modern words, all the blessings of the Gospel are a gift of God, and are bestowed only on moral conditions. Faith which leads to love and personal submission to the will of God makes a man a Christian. Therefore, outward ordinances are only of use as they help a man to that personal act.

Therefore, no other man or body of men can do it for us, or come between us and God.

And in confirmation, notice how Peter here speaks of forgiveness. His words do not sound as if he thought that he held the power of absolution, but he tells Simon to go to God who alone can forgive, and refers Simon's fate to God's mercy.

These tendencies, which Simon expresses so baldly, are in us all, and are continually reappearing. How far much of what calls itself Christianity has drifted from Peter's principle laid down here, that moral and spiritual qualifications are the only ones which avail for securing 'part or lot in the matter' of Christ's gifts received for, and bestowed on, men! How much which really rests on the opposite principle, that these gifts can be imparted by men who are supposed to possess them, apart altogether from the state of heart of the would-be recipient, we see around us to-day! *Simony* is said to be the securing ecclesiastical promotion by purchase. But it is much rather the belief that 'the gift of God can be purchased with' anything but personal faith in Jesus, the Giver and the Gift. The effects of it are patent among us. Ceremonies usurp the place of faith. A priesthood is exalted. The universal Christian prerogative of individual access to God is obscured. Christianity is turned into a kind of magic.

III. An instance of the worthlessness of partial convictions.

Simon was but slightly moved by Peter's stern rebuke. He paid no heed to the exhortation to pray for forgiveness and to repent of his wickedness, but still remained in substantially his old error, in that he accredited Peter with power, and asked him to pray for him, as if the Apostle's prayer would have some special access to God which his, though he were penitent, could not have. Further, he showed no sense of sin. All that he wished was that 'none of the things which ye have spoken come upon me.'

How useless are convictions which go no deeper down than Simon's did!

What became of him we do not know. But there are old ecclesiastical traditions about him which represent him as a bitter enemy in future of the Apostle. And Josephus has a story of a Simon who played a degrading part between Felix and Drusilla, and who is thought by some to have been he. But in any case, we have no reason to believe that he ever followed Peter's counsel or prayed to God for forgiveness. So he stands for us as one more tragic example of a man, once 'not far from the kingdom of God' and drifting ever further away from it, because, at the fateful moment, he would not enter in. It is hard to bring such a man as near again as he once was. Let us learn that the one key which opens the treasury of God's blessings, stored for us all in Jesus, is our own personal faith, and let us beware of shutting our ears and our hearts against the merciful rebukes that convict us of 'this our wickedness,' and point us to the 'Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,' and therefore our sin.

A MEETING IN THE DESERT

'And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the
south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.
27. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great
authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her
treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, 28. Was returning, and

sitting in his chariot, read Esaias the prophet. 29. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31. And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. 32. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth: 33. In His humiliation His judgment was taken away; and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth. 34. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? 35. Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. 36. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37. And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. 40. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through, he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.'—Acts viii. 26-40.

PHILIP had no special divine command either to flee to, or to preach in, Samaria, but 'an angel of the Lord,' and afterwards 'the Spirit,' directed him to the Ethiopian statesman. God rewards faithful work with more work. Samaria was a borderland between Jew and Gentile, but in preaching to the eunuch Philip was on entirely Gentile ground. So great a step in advance needed clear command from God to impel to it and to justify it.

I. We have, then, first, the new commission. Philip might well wonder why he should be taken away from successful work in a populous city, and despatched to the lonely road to Gaza. But he obeyed at once. He knew not for what he was sent there, but that ignorance did not trouble or retard him. It should be enough for us to see the next step. 'We walk by faith, not by sight,' for we none of us know what comes of our actions, and we get light as we go. Do to-day's plain duty, and when to-morrow is to-day its duty will be plain too. The river on which we sail winds, and not till we round the nearest bend do we see the course beyond. So we are kept in the peaceful posture of dependent obedience, and need to hold our communications with God open, that we may be sure of His guidance.

No doubt, as Philip trudged along till he reached the Gaza road, he would have many a thought as to what he was to find there, and, when he came at last to the solitary track, would look eagerly over the uninhabited land for an explanation of his strange and vague instructions. But an obedient heart is not long left perplexed, and he who looks for duty to disclose itself will see it in due time.

II. So we have next the explanation of the errand. Luke's 'Behold!' suggests the sudden sight of the great man's cortege in the distance. No doubt, he travelled with a train of attendants, as became his dignity, and would be conspicuous from afar. Philip, of course, did not know who he was when he caught sight of him, but Luke tells his rank at once, in order to lay stress on it, as well as to bring out the significance of his occupation and subsequent conversion. Here was a full-blooded Gentile, an eunuch, a courtier, who had been drawn to Israel's God, and was studying Israel's prophets as he rode. Perhaps he had chosen that road to Egypt for its quietness. At any rate, his occupation revealed the bent of his mind.

Philip felt that the mystery of his errand was solved now, and he recognised the impulse to break through conventional barriers and address the evidently dignified stranger, as the voice of God's Spirit, and not his own. How he was sure of that we do not know, but the distinction drawn between the former communication by an angel and this from the Spirit points to a clear difference in his experiences, and to careful discrimination in the narrator. The variation is not made at random. Philip did not mistake a buzzing in his ears from the beating of his own heart for a divine voice. We have here no hallucinations of an enthusiast, but plain fact.

How manifestly the meeting of these two, starting so far apart, and so ignorant of each other and of the purpose of their being thrown together, reveals the unseen hand that moved each on his own line, and brought about the intersection of the two at that exact spot and hour! How came it that at that moment the Ethiopian was reading, of all places in his roll, the very words which make the kernel of the gospel of the evangelical prophet? Surely such 'coincidences' are a hard nut to crack for deniers of a Providence that shapes our ends!

It is further to be noticed that the eunuch's conversion does not appear to have been of importance for the expansion of the Church. It exercised no recorded influence, and was apparently not communicated to the Apostles, as, if it had been, it could scarcely have failed to have been referred to when the analogous case of Cornelius was under discussion. So, divine intervention and human journeying and work were brought into play simply for the sake of one soul which God's eye saw to be ripe for the Gospel. He cares for the individual, and one sheep that can be reclaimed is precious enough in the Shepherd's estimate to move His hand to action and His heart to love. Not because he was a man of great authority at Candace's court, but because he was yearning for light, and ready to follow it when it shone, did the eunuch meet Philip on that quiet road.

III. The two men being thus strangely brought together, we have next the conversation for the sake of which they were brought together. The eunuch was reading aloud, as people not very much used to books, or who have some difficult passage in hand, often do. Philip must have been struck with astonishment when he caught the, to him, familiar words, and must have seen at once the open door for his preaching. His abrupt question wastes no time with apologies or polite, gradual approaches to his object. Probably the very absence of the signs of deference to which he was accustomed impressed the eunuch with a dim sense of the stranger's authority, which would be deepened by the home-thrust of his question.

The wistful answer not only shows no resentment at the brusque stranger's thrusting himself in, but acknowledges bewilderment, and responds to the undertone of proffered guidance in the question. A teacher has often to teach a pupil his ignorance, to begin with; but it should be so done as to create desire for instruction, and to kindle confidence in him as instructor. It is insolent to ask, 'Understandest thou?' unless the questioner is ready and able to help to understand.

The invitation to a seat in the great man's chariot showed how eagerness to learn had obliterated distinctions of rank, and swiftly knit a new bond between these two, who had never heard of each other five minutes before. A true heart will hail as its best and closest friend him who leads it to know God's mind more clearly. How earthly dignities dwindle when God's messenger lays hold of a soul!

So the chariot rolls on, and through the silence of the desert the voices of these two reach the wondering attendants, as they plod along. The Ethiopian was reading the Septuagint translation of Isaiah, which, though it missed part of the force of the original, brought clearly before him the great figure of a

Sufferer, meek and dumb, swept from the earth by unjust judgment. He understood so much, but what he did not understand was who this great, tragic Figure represented. His question goes to the root of the matter, and is a burning question to-day, as it was all these centuries ago on the road to Gaza. Philip had no doubt of the answer. Jesus was the 'lamb dumb before its shearers.' This is not the place to enter on such wide questions, but we may at least affirm that, whatever advance modern schools have made in the criticism and interpretation of the Old Testament, the very spirit of the whole earlier Revelation is missed if Jesus is not discerned as the Person to whom prophet and ritual pointed, in whom law was fulfilled and history reached its goal.

No doubt much instruction followed. How long they had rode together before they came to 'a certain water' we know not, but it cannot have been more than a few hours. Time is elastic, and when the soil is prepared, and rain and sunlight are poured down, the seed springs up quickly. People who deny the possibility of 'sudden conversions' are blind to facts, because they wear the blinkers of a theory. Not always have they who 'anon with joy receive' the word 'no root in themselves.'

As is well known, the answer to the eunuch's question (v. 37) is wanting in authoritative manuscripts. The insertion may have been due to the creeping into the text of a marginal note. A recent and most original commentator on the Acts (Blass) considers that this, like other remarkable readings found in one set of manuscripts, was written by Luke in a draft of the book, which he afterwards revised and somewhat abbreviated into the form which most of the manuscripts present.

However that may be, the required conditions in the doubtful verse are those which the practice of the rest of the Acts shows to have been required. Faith in Jesus Christ the Son of God was the qualification for the baptisms there recorded.

And there was no other qualification. Philip asked nothing about the eunuch's proselytism, or whether he had been circumcised or not. He did not, like Peter with Cornelius, need the evidence of the gift of the Spirit before he baptized; but, notwithstanding his experience of an unworthy candidate in Simon the sorcerer, he unhesitatingly administered baptism. There was no Church present to witness the rite. We do not read that the Holy Ghost fell on the eunuch.

That baptism in the quiet wady by the side of the solitary road, while the swarthy attendants stood in wonder, was a mighty step in advance; and it was taken, not by an Apostle, nor with ecclesiastical sanction, but at the bidding of Christian instinct, which recognised a brother in any man who had faith in Jesus, the Son of God. The new faith is bursting old bonds. The universality of the Gospel is overflowing the banks of Jewish narrowness. Probably Philip was quite unconscious of the revolutionary nature of his act, but it was done, and in it was the seed of many more.

The eunuch had said that he could not understand unless some man guided him. But when Philip is caught away, he does not bewail the loss of his guide. He went on his road with joy, though his new faith might have craved longer support from the crutch of a teacher, and fuller enlightenment. What made him able to do without the guide that a few hours before had been so indispensable? The presence in his heart of a better one, even of Him whom Jesus promised, to guide His servants into all truth. If those who believe that Scripture without an authorised interpreter is insufficient to lead men aright, would consider the end of this story, they might find that a man's dependence on outward teachers ceases when he has God's Spirit to teach him, and that for such a man the Word of God in his hand and the Spirit of God in his spirit will give him light enough to walk by, so that, in the absence of all outward instructors, he may still be filled with true wisdom, and in absolute solitude may go 'on his way rejoicing.'

PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

'But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.'—Acts viii. 40.

The little that is known about Philip, the deacon and evangelist, may very soon be told. His name suggests, though by no means conclusively, that he was probably one of the so-called Hellenists, or foreign-born and Greek-speaking Jews. This is made the more probable because he was one of the seven selected by the Church, and after that selection appointed by the Apostles, to dispense relief to the poor. The purpose of the appointment being to conciliate the grumblers in the Hellenist section of the Church, the persons chosen would probably belong to it. He left Jerusalem during the persecution 'that arose after the death of Stephen.' As we know, he was the first preacher of the Gospel in Samaria; he was next the instrument honoured to carry the Word to the first heathen ever gathered into the Church; and then, after a journey along the seacoast to Cæsarea, the then seat of government, he remained in that place in obscure toil for twenty years, dropped out of the story, and we hear no more of him but for one glimpse of his home in Cæsarea.

That is all that is told about him. And I think that if we note the contrast of the office to which men called him, and the work to which God set him; and the other still more striking contrast between the brilliancy of the beginning of his course, and the obscurity of his long years of work, we may get some lessons worth the learning. I take, then, not only the words which I read for my text, but the whole of the incidents connected with Philip, as our starting-point now; and I draw from them two or three very well-worn, but none the less needful, pieces of instruction.

I. First, then, we may gather a thought as to Christ's sovereignty in choosing His instruments.

Did you ever notice that events exactly contradicted the intentions of the Church and of the Apostles, in the selection of Philip and his six brethren? The Apostles said, 'It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables. Pick out seven relieving-officers; men who shall do the secular work of the Church, and look after the poor; and we will give ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.' So said man. And what did facts say? That as to these twelve, who were to 'give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word,' we never hear that by far the larger proportion of them were honoured to do anything worth mentioning for the spread of the Gospel. Their function was to be 'witnesses,' and that was all. But, on the other hand, of the men that were supposed to be fitted for secular work, two at all events had more to do in the expansion of the Church, and in the development of the universal aspects of Christ's Gospel, than the whole of the original group of Apostles. So Christ picks His instruments. The Apostles may say, 'These shall do so-and-so; and we will do so-and-so.' Christ says, 'Stephen shall proclaim a wider Gospel than the Apostles at first had caught sight of, and Philip shall be the first who will go beyond the charmed circle of Judaism, and preach the Gospel.'

It is always so. Christ chooses His instruments where He will; and it is not the Apostle's business, nor the business of an ecclesiastic of any sort, to settle his own work or anybody else's. The Commander-in-Chief keeps the choosing of the men for special service in His own hand. The Apostolic College said, 'Let them look after the poor, and leave us to look after the ministry of the Word'; Christ says, 'Go and join thyself to that chariot, and speak there the speech that I shall bid thee.'

Brethren, do you listen for that voice calling you to your tasks, and never mind what men may be saying. Wait till *He* bids, and you will hear Him speaking to you if you will keep yourselves quiet. Wait till He bids you, and then be sure that you do it. Christ chooses His instruments, and chooses them often in strange places.

II. The next lesson that I would take from this story is the spontaneous speech of a believing heart.

There came a persecution that scattered the Church. Men tried to fling down the lamp; and all that they did was to spill the oil, and it ran flaming wherever it flowed. For the scattered brethren, without any Apostle with them, with no instruction given to them to do so, wherever they went carried their faith with them; and, as a matter of course, wherever they went they spoke their faith. And so we read that, not by appointment, nor of set purpose, nor in consequence of any ecclesiastical or official sanction, nor in consequence of any supernatural and distinct commandment from heaven, but just because it was the natural thing to do, and they could not help it, they went everywhere, these scattered men of Cyprus and Cyrene, preaching the word.

And when this Philip, whom the officials had relegated to the secular work of distributing charity, found himself in Samaria, he did the like. The Samaritans were outcasts, and Peter and John had wanted to bring down fire from heaven to consume them. But Philip could not help speaking out the truth that was in his heart.

So it always will be: we can all talk about what we are interested in. The full heart cannot be condemned to silence. If there is no necessity for speech felt by a professing Christian, that professing Christian's faith is a very superficial thing. 'We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard,' said one of the Apostles, thereby laying down the great charter of freedom of speech for all profound convictions. 'Thy word was as a fire in my bones when I said, I will speak no more in Thy name,' so petulant and self-willed was I, 'and I was weary with forbearing,' and ashamed of my rash vow; 'and I could not stay.'

Dear friends, do you carry with you the impulse for utterance of Christ's name wherever you go? And is it so sweet in your hearts that you cannot but let its sweetness have expression by your lips? Surely, surely this spontaneous instinctive utterance of Philip, by which a loving heart sought to relieve itself, puts to shame the 'dumb dogs' that make up such an enormous proportion of professing Christians. And surely such an experience as his may well throw a very sinister light on the reality—nay! I will not say the *reality*, that would be too uncharitable—but upon the depth and vitality of the profession of Christianity which these silent ones make.

III. Another lesson that seems to me strikingly illustrated by the story with which we are concerned, is the guidance of a divine hand in common life, and when there are no visible nor supernatural signs.

Philip goes down to Samaria because he must, and speaks because he cannot help it. He is next bidden to take a long journey, from the centre of the land, away down to the southern desert; and at a certain point there the Spirit says to him, 'Go! join thyself to this chariot.' And when his work with the Ethiopian statesman is done, then he is swept away by the power of the Spirit of God, as Ezekiel had been long before by the banks of the river Chebar, and is set down, no doubt all bewildered and breathless, at Azotus—the ancient Ashdod—the Philistine city on the low-lying coast. Was Philip less under Christ's guidance when miracle ceased and he was left to ordinary powers? Did he feel as if deserted by Christ, because, instead of being swept by the strong wind of heaven, he had to tramp wearily along the flat shore with the flashing Mediterranean on his left hand reflecting the hot sunshine? Did it seem to him as if his task in preaching the Gospel in these villages through which he passed on his way to Cæsarea was less distinctly obedience to the divine command than when he heard the utterance of the Spirit, 'Go down to the road which leads to Gaza, which is desert'? By no means. To this man, as to every faithful soul, the guidance that came through his own judgment and common sense, through the instincts and impulses of his sanctified nature, by the circumstances which he devoutly believed to be God's providence, was as truly direct divine guidance as if all the angels of heaven had blown commandment with their trumpets into his waiting and stunned ears.

And so you and I have to go upon our paths without angel voices, or chariots of storm, and to be contented with divine commandments less audible or perceptible to our senses than this man had at one point in his career. But if we are wise we shall hear Him speaking the word. We shall not be left without His voice if we wait for it, stilling our own inclinations until His solemn commandment is made plain to us, and then stirring up our inclinations that they may sway us to swift obedience. There is no gulf, for the devout heart, between what is called miraculous and what is called ordinary and common. Equally in both does God manifest His will to His servants, and equally in both is His presence perceived by faith. We do not need to envy Philip's brilliant beginning. Let us see that we imitate his quiet close of life.

IV. The last lesson that I would draw is this—the nobility of persistence in unnoticed work.

What a contrast to the triumphs in Samaria, and the other great expansion of the field for the Gospel effected by the God-commanded preaching to the eunuch, is presented by the succeeding twenty years of altogether unrecorded but faithful toil! Persistence in such unnoticed work is made all the more difficult, and to any but a very true man would have been all but impossible, by reason of the contrast which such work offered to the glories of the earlier days. Some of us may have been tried in a similar fashion, all of us have more or less the same kind of difficulty to face. Some of us perhaps may have had gleams, at the beginning of our career, that seemed to give hope of fields of activity more brilliant and of work far better than we have ever had or done again in the long weary toil of daily life. There may have been abortive promises, at the commencement of your careers, that seemed to say that you would occupy a more conspicuous position than life has had really in reserve for you. At any rate, we have all had our dreams, for

> 'If Nature put not forth her power
> About the opening of the flower,
> Who is there that could live an hour?'

and no life is all that the liver of it meant it to be when he began. We dream of building palaces or temples, and we have to content ourselves if we can put up some little shed in which we may shelter.

Philip, who began so conspicuously, and so suddenly ceased to be the special instrument in the hands of the Spirit, kept plod, plod, plodding on, with no bitterness of heart. For twenty years he had no share in the development of Gentile Christianity, of which he had sowed the first seed, but had to do much less conspicuous work. He toiled away there in Cæsarea patient, persevering, and contented, because he loved the work, and he loved the work because he loved Him that had set it. He seemed to be passed over by his Lord in His choice of instruments. It was he who was selected to be the first man that should preach to the heathen. But did you ever notice that although he was probably in Cæsarea at the time, Cornelius was not bid to apply to *Philip*, who was at his elbow, but to send to Joppa for the Apostle Peter? Philip might have sulked and said: 'Why was I not chosen to do this work? I will speak no more in this Name.'

It did not fall to his lot to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. One who came after him was preferred before him, and the Hellenist Saul was set to the task which might have seemed naturally to belong to the Hellenist Philip. He too might have said, 'He must increase, but I must decrease.' No doubt he did say it in spirit, with noble self-abnegation and freedom from jealousy. He cordially welcomed Paul to his house in Cæsarea twenty years afterwards, and rejoiced that one sows and another reaps; and that so the division of labour is the multiplication of gladness.

A beautiful superiority to all the low thoughts that are apt to mar our persistency in unobtrusive and unrecognised work is set before us in this story. There are many temptations to-day, dear brethren, what with gossiping newspapers and other means of publicity for everything that is done, for men to say, 'Well, if I cannot get any notice for my work I shall not do it.'

Boys in the street will refuse to join in games, saying, 'I shall not play unless I am captain or have the big drum.' And there are not wanting Christian men who lay down like conditions. 'Play well thy part' wherever it is. Never mind the honour. Do the duty God appoints, and He that has the two mites of the widow in His treasury will never forget any of our works, and at the right time will tell them out before His Father, and before the holy angels.

GRACE TRIUMPHANT

‘And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 2. And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. 3. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? 5. And he said, Who art Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. 6. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. 7. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. 8. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. 9. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink. 10. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. 11. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus; for, behold, he prayeth, 12. And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. . . . 17. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. 19. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. 20. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.’—ACTS ix. 1-12; 17-20.

THIS chapter begins with ‘but,’ which contrasts Saul's persistent hatred, which led him to Gentile lands to persecute, with Philip's expansive evangelistic work. Both men were in profound earnest, both went abroad to carry on their work, but the one sought to plant what the other was eager to destroy. If the ‘but’ in verse 1 contrasts, the ‘yet’ connects the verse with chapter viii. 3. Saul's fury was no passing outburst, but enduring. Like other indulged passions, it grew with exercise, and had come to be as his very life-breath, and now planned, not only imprisonment, but death, for the heretics.

Not content with carrying his hateful inquisition into the homes of the Christians in Jerusalem, he will follow the fugitives to Damascus. The extension of the persecution was his own thought. He was not the tool of the Sanhedrin, but their mover. They would probably have been content to cleanse Jerusalem, but the young zealot would not rest till he had followed the dispersed poison into every corner where it might have trickled. The high priest would not discourage such useful zeal, however he might smile at its excess.

So Saul got the letters he asked, and some attendants, apparently, to help him in his hunt, and set off for Damascus. Painters have imagined him as riding thither, but more probably he and his people went on foot. It was a journey of some five or six days. The noon of the last day had come, and the groves of Damascus were, perhaps, in sight. No doubt, the young Pharisee's head was busy settling what he was to begin with when he entered the city, and was exulting in the thought of how he would harry the meek Christians, when the sudden light shone.

At all events, the narrative does not warrant the view, often taken now, that there had been any preparatory process in Saul's mind, which had begun to sap his confidence that Jesus was a blasphemer, and himself a warrior for God. That view is largely adopted in order to get rid of the supernatural, and to bolster up the assumption that there are no sudden conversions; but the narrative of Luke, and Paul's own references, are dead against it. At one moment he is 'yet breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord,' and in almost the next he is prone on his face, asking, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' It was not a case of a landslide suddenly sweeping down, but long prepared for by the gradual percolation of water to the slippery understrata, but the solid earth was shaken, and the mountain crashed down in sudden ruin.

The causes of Saul's conversion are plain in the narrative, even though the shortened form is adopted, which is found in the Revised Version. The received text has probably been filled out by additions from Paul's own account in chapter xxvi. First came the blaze of light outshining the midday sun, even in that land where its beams are like swords. That blinding light 'shone round about him,' enveloping him in its glory. Chapter xxvi. (verse 13) tells that his companions also were wrapped in the lustre, and that all fell to the earth, no doubt in terror.

Saul is not said, either in this or in his own accounts, to have seen Jesus, but 1 Corinthians xv. 8 establishes that he did so, and Ananias (v. 17) refers to Jesus as having 'appeared.' That appearance, whatever may have been the psychological account of it, was by Paul regarded as being equal in evidential value to the flesh-and-blood vision of the risen Lord which the other Apostles witnessed to, and as placing him in the same line as a witness.

It is to be noted also, that, while the attendants saw the light, they were not blinded, as Saul was; from which it may be inferred that he saw with his bodily eyes the glorified manhood of Jesus, as we are told that one day, when He returns as Judge, 'every eye shall see Him.' Be that as it may,—and we have not material for constructing a theory of the manner of Christ's appearance to Saul,—the overwhelming conviction was flooded into his soul, that the Jesus whom he had thought of as a blasphemer, falsely alleged to have risen from the dead, lived in heavenly glory, amid celestial brightness too dazzling for human eyes.

The words of gentle remonstrance issuing from the flashing glory went still further to shake the foundations of the young Pharisee's life; for they, as with one lightning gleam, laid bare the whole madness and sin of the crusade which he had thought acceptable to God. 'Why persecutest thou Me?' Then the odious heretics were knit by some mysterious bond to this glorious One, so that He bled in their wounds and felt their pains! Then Saul had been, as his old teacher dreaded they of the Sanhedrin might be, fighting against God! How the reasons for Saul's persecution had crumbled away, till there were none left with which to answer Jesus' question! Jesus lived, and was exalted to glory. He was identified with His servants. He had appeared to Saul, and deigned to plead with him.

No wonder that the man who had been planning fresh assaults on the disciples ten minutes before, was crushed and abject as he lay there on the road, and these tremendous new convictions rushed like a cataract over and into his soul! No wonder that the lessons burned in on him in that hour of destiny became the centre-point of all his future teaching! That vision revolutionised his thinking and his life. None can affirm that it was incompetent to do so.

Luke's account here, like Paul's in chapter xxii., represents further instructions from Jesus as postponed till Saul's meeting with Ananias, while Paul's other account in chapter xxvi. omits mention of the latter, and gives the substance of what he said in Damascus as said on the road by Jesus. The one account is more detailed than the other, that is all. The gradual unfolding of the heavenly purpose which our narrative gives is in accord with the divine manner. For the moment enough had been done to convert the persecutor into the servant, to level with the ground his self-righteousness, to reveal to him the glorified Jesus, to bend his will and make it submissive. The rest would be told him in due time.

The attendants had fallen to the ground like him, but seem to have struggled to their feet again, while he lay prostrate. They saw the brightness, but not the Person: they heard the voice, but not the words. Saul staggered by their help to his feet, and then found that with open eyes he was blind. Imagination or hallucination does not play tricks of that sort with the organs of sense.

The supernatural is too closely intertwined with the story to be taken out of it without reducing it to tatters. The greatest of Christian teachers, who has probably exercised more influence than any man who ever lived, was made a Christian by a miracle. That fact is not to be got rid of. But we must remember that once when He speaks of it He points to God's revelation of His Son '*in* Him' as its essential character. The external appearance was the vehicle of the inward revelation. It is to be remembered, too, that the miracle did not take away Saul's power of accepting or rejecting the Christ; for he tells Agrippa that he was 'not disobedient to the heavenly vision.'

What a different entry he made into Damascus from what he expected, and what a different man it was that crawled up to the door of Judas, in the street that is called Straight, from the self-confident young fanatic who had left Jerusalem with the high priest's letters in his bosom and fierce hate in his heart!

Ananias was probably not one of the fugitives, as his language about Saul implies that he knew of his doings only by hearsay. The report of Saul's coming and authority to arrest disciples had reached Damascus before him, with the wonderful quickness with which news travels in the East, nobody knows how. Ananias's fears being quieted, he went to the house where for three days Saul had been lying lonely in the dark, fasting, and revolving many things in his heart. No doubt his Lord had spoken many a word to him, though not by vision, but by whispering to his spirit. Silence and solitude root truth in a soul. After such a shock, absolute seclusion was best.

Ananias discharged his commission with lovely tenderness and power. How sweet and strange to speaker and hearer would that 'Brother Saul' sound! How strong and grateful a confirmation of his vision would Ananias's reference to the appearance of the Lord bring! How humbly would the proud Pharisee bow to receive, laid on his head, the hands that he had thought to bind with chains! What new eyes would look out on a world in which all things had become new, when there fell from them as it had been scales, and as quickly as had come the blinding, so quickly came the restored vision!

Ananias was neither Apostle nor official, yet the laying on of his hands communicated 'the Holy Ghost.' Saul received that gift before baptism, not after or through the ordinance. It was important for his future relations to the Apostles that he should not have been introduced to the Church by them, or owed to them his first human Christian teaching. Therefore he could say that he was 'an Apostle, not from men, neither through man.' It was important for us that in that great instance that divine gift should have been bestowed without the conditions accompanying, which have too often been regarded as necessary for, its possession.

'THIS WAY'

'Any of this way.'—ACTS ix. 2.

THE name of 'Christian' was not applied to themselves by the followers of Jesus before the completion of the New Testament. There were other names in currency before that designation—which owed its origin to the scoffing wits of Antioch—was accepted by the Church. They called themselves 'disciples,' 'believers,' 'saints,' 'brethren,' as if feeling about for a title.

Here is a name that had obtained currency for a while, and was afterwards disused. We find it five times in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, never elsewhere; and always, with one exception, it should be rendered, as it is in the Revised Version, not '*this* way,' as if being one amongst many, but '*the* way,' as being the only one.

Now, I have thought that this designation of Christians as 'those of the way' rests upon a very profound and important view of what Christianity is, and may teach us some lessons if we will ponder it; and I ask your attention to two or three of these for a few moments now.

I. First, then, I take this name as being a witness to the conviction that in Christianity we have the only road to God.

There may be some reference in the name to the remarkable words of our Lord Jesus Christ: 'I am the Way. No man cometh to the Father but by Me,'—words of which the audacity is unparalleled and unpardonable, except upon the supposition that He bears an unique relation to God on the one hand, and to all mankind upon the other. In them He claims to be the sole medium of communication between heaven and earth, God and man. And that same exclusiveness is reflected in this name for Christians. It asserts that faith in Jesus Christ, the acceptance of His teaching, mediation and guidance, is the only path that climbs to God, and by it alone do we come into knowledge of, and communion with, our divine Father.

I do not dwell upon the fact that, according to our Lord's own teaching, and according to the whole New Testament, Christ's work of making God known to man did not begin with His Incarnation and earthly life, but that from the beginning that eternal Word was the agent of all divine activity in creation, and in the illumination of mankind. So that, not only all the acts of the self-revealing God were through Him, but that from Him, as from the light of men, came all the light in human hearts, of reason and of conscience, by which there were and are in all men, some dim knowledge of God, and some feeling after, or at the lowest some consciousness of, Him. But the historical facts of Christ's incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension are the source of all solid certitude, and of all clear knowledge of our Father in Heaven. His words are spirit and life; His works are unspoken words; and by both He declares unto His brethren the Name, and is the self-manifestation of, the Father.

Think of the contrast presented by the world's conceptions of Godhead, and the reality as unveiled in Christ! On the one hand you have gods lustful, selfish, passionate, capricious, cruel, angry, vile; or gods remote, indifferent, not only passionless, but heartless, inexorable, unapproachable, whom no man can know, whom no man can love, whom no man can trust. On the other hand, if you look at Christ's tears as the revelation of God; if you look at Christ's ruth and pity as the manifestation of the inmost glory of the divine nature; if you take your stand at the foot of the Cross—a strange place to see 'the power of God and the wisdom of God'!—and look up there at Him dying for the world, and are able to say, 'Lo! this is our God! through all the weary centuries we have waited for Him, and this is He!' then you can understand how true it is that there, and there only, is the good news proclaimed that lifts the burden from every heart, and reveals God the Lover and the Friend of every soul.

And if, further, we consider the difference between the dim 'peradventures,' the doubts and fears, the uncertain conclusions drawn from questionable, and often partial, premises, which confessedly never amount to demonstration, if we consider the contrast between these and the daylight of fact which we meet in Jesus Christ, His love, life, and death, then we can feel how superior in certitude, as in substance, the revelation of God in Jesus is to all these hopes, longings, doubts, and how it alone is worthy to be called the knowledge of God, or is solid enough to abide comparison with the certainties of the most arrogant physical science.

There never was a time in the history of the world when, so clearly and unmistakably, every thinking soul amongst cultivated nations was being brought up to this alternative—Christ, the Revealer of God, or no knowledge of God at all. The old dreams of heathenism are impossible for us; modern agnosticism will make very quick work of a deism which does not cling to the Christ as the Revealer of the Godhead. And I, for my part, believe that there is one thing, and one thing only, which will save modern Europe from absolute godlessness, and that is the coming back to the old truth, 'No man hath seen God' by sense, or intuition, or reason, or conscience, 'at any time. The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.'

But it is not merely as bringing to us the only certain knowledge of our Father God that Christianity is 'the way,' but it is also because by it alone we come into fellowship with the God whom it reveals to us. If there rises up before your mind the thought of Him in the Heavens, there will rise up also in your consciousness the sense of your own sin. And that is no delusion nor fancy; it is the most patent fact, that between you and your Father in Heaven, howsoever loving, tender, compassionate, and forgiving, there lies a great gulf. You cannot go to God, my brother, with all that guilt heaped upon your conscience; you cannot come near to Him with all that mass of evil which you know is there, working in your soul. How shall a sinful soul come to a holy God? And there is only one answer—that great Lord, by His blessed death upon the Cross, has cleared away all the mountains of guilt and sin that rise up frowning between each single soul and the Father in Heaven; and through Him, by a new and living way, which He hath opened for us, we have entrance to God, and dwell with Him.

And it is not only that He brings to us the knowledge of God, and that He clears away all obstacles, and makes fellowship between God and us possible for the most polluted and sinful of spirits, but it is also that, by the knowledge of His great love to us, love is kindled in our hearts, and we are drawn into that path which, as a matter of fact, we shall not tread unless we yield to the magnetic attraction of the love of God as revealed 'in the face of Jesus Christ.'

Men do not seek fellowship with God until they are drawn to Him by the love that is revealed upon the Cross. Men do not yield their hearts to Him until their hearts are melted down by the fire of that Infinite divine love which disdained not to be humiliated and refused not to die for their sakes. Practically and really we come to God, when—and I venture upon the narrowness of saying, *only* when—God has come to us in His dear Son. '*The* way' to God is through Christ. Have you trod it, my friend—that new and living way, which leads within the veil, into the secrets of loving communion with your Father in Heaven?

II. Then there is another principle, of which this designation of our text is also the witness, viz., that in Christianity we have the path of conduct and practical life traced out for us all.

The 'way of a man' is, of course, a metaphor for his outward life and conduct. It is connected with the familiar old image which belongs to the poetry of all languages, by which life is looked at as a journey. That metaphor speaks to us of the continual changefulness of our mortal condition; it speaks to us, also, of the effort and the weariness which often attend it. It proclaims also the solemn thought that a man's life is a unity, and that, progressive, it goes some whither, and arrives at a definite goal.

And that idea is taken up in this phrase, '*the* way,' in such a fashion as that there are two things asserted: first, that Christianity provides *a* way, a path for the practical activity, that it moulds our life into a unity, that it prescribes the line of direction which it is to follow, that it has a starting-point, and stages, and an end; also, that Christianity is *the* way for practical life, the only path and mode of conduct which corresponds with all the obligations and nature of a man, and which reason, conscience, and experience will approve. Let us look, just for a moment or two, at these two thoughts: Christianity is *a* way; Christianity is *the* way.

It is a way. These early disciples must have grasped with great clearness and tenacity the practical side of the Gospel, or they would never have adopted this name. If they had thought of it as being only a creed, they would not have done so.

And it is not only a creed. All creed is meant to influence conduct. If I may so say, *credenda*, 'things to be believed,' are meant to underlie the *agenda*, the things to be done. Every doctrine of the New Testament, like the great blocks of concrete that are dropped into a river in order to lay the foundation of a bridge, or the embankment that is run across a valley in order to carry a railway upon it,—every doctrine of the New Testament is meant to influence the conduct, the 'walk and conversation,' and to provide a path on which activity may advance and expatiate.

I cannot, of course, dwell upon this point with sufficient elaboration, or take up one after another the teachings of the New Testament, in order to show how close is their bearing upon practical life. There is plenty of abstract theology in the form of theological systems, skeletons all dried up that have no life in them. There is nothing of that sort in the principles as they lie on the pages of the New Testament. There they are all throbbing with life, and all meant to influence life and conduct.

Remember, my friend, that unless your Christianity is doing that for you, unless it has prescribed a path of life for you, and moulded your steps into a great unity, and drawn you along the road, it is nought,—nought!

But the whole matter may be put into half a dozen sentences. The living heart of Christianity, either considered as a revelation to a man, or as a power within a man, that is to say, either objective or subjective, is love. It is the revelation of the love of God that is the inmost essence of it as revelation. It is love in my heart that is the inmost essence of it as a fact of my nature. And is not love the most powerful of all forces to influence conduct? Is it not 'the fulfilling of the law,' because its one single self includes all commandments, and is the ideal of all duty, and also because it is the power which will secure the keeping of all the law which itself lays down?

But love may be followed out into its two main effects. These are self-surrender and imitation. And I say that a religious system which is, in its inmost heart and essence, love, is thereby shown to be the most practical of all systems, because thereby it is shown to be a great system of self-surrender and imitation.

The deepest word of the Gospel is, 'Yield yourselves to God.' Bring your wills and bow them before Him, and say, 'Here am I; take me, and use me as a pawn on Thy great chessboard, to be put where Thou wilt.' When once a man's will is absorbed into the divine will, as a drop of water is into the ocean, he is free, and has happiness and peace, and is master and lord of himself and of the universe. That system which proclaims love as its heart sets in action self-surrender as the most practical of all the powers of life.

Love is imitation. And Jesus Christ's life is set before us as the pattern for all our conduct. We are to follow in His footsteps. These mark our path. We are to follow Him, as a traveller who knows not his way will carefully tread in the steps of his guide. We are to imitate Him, as a scholar who is learning to draw will copy every touch of the master's pencil.

Strange that that short life, fragmentarily reported in four little tracts, full of unapproachable peculiarities, and having no part in many of the relationships which make so large a portion of most lives, is yet so transparently under the influence of the purest and broadest principles of righteousness and morality as that every age and each sex, and men of all professions, idiosyncrasies, temperaments, and positions, all stages of civilisation and culture, of every period, and of every country, may find in it the all-sufficient pattern for them!

Thus in Christianity we have a way. It prescribes a line of direction for the life, and brings all its power to bear in marking the course which we should pursue and in making us willing and able to pursue it.

How different, how superior to all other systems which aspire to regulate the outward life that system is! It is superior, in its applicability to all conditions. It is a very difficult thing for any man to apply the generalities of moral law and righteousness to the individual cases in his life. The stars are very bright, but they do not show me which street to turn up when I am at a loss; but Christ's example comes very near to us, and guides us, not indeed in regard to questions of prudence or expediency, but in regard to all questions of right or wrong. It is superior, in the help it gives to a soul struggling with temptation. It is very hard to keep law or duty clearly before our eyes at such a moment. when it is most needful to do so. The light-house is lost in the fog, but the example of Jesus Christ dissipates many mists of temptation to the heart that loves Him; and 'they that follow Him shall not walk in darkness.'

It is superior in this, further, that patterns fail because they are only patterns, and cannot get themselves executed, and laws fail because they are only laws and cannot get themselves obeyed. What is the use of a signpost to a man who is lame, or who does not want to go down the road, though he knows it well enough? But Christianity brings both the commandment and the motive that keeps the commandment.

And so it is *the* path along which we can travel. It is the only road that corresponds to all our necessities, and capacities, and obligations.

It is the only path, my brother, that will be approved by reason, conscience, and experience. The greatest of our English mystics says somewhere—I do not profess to quote with verbal accuracy—'There are two questions which put an end to all the vain projects and designs of human life. The one is, "What for?" the other, "What good will the aim do you if attained?"'

If we look at 'all the ways of men' calmly, and with due regard to the wants of their souls, reason cannot but say that they are 'vain and melancholy.' If we consult our own experience we cannot but confess that whatsoever we have had or enjoyed, apart from God, has either proved disappointing in the very moment of its possession, or has been followed by a bitter taste on the tongue; or in a little while has faded, and left us standing with the stalk in our hands from which the bloom has dropped. Generation after generation has sighed its 'Amen!' to the stern old word: 'Vanity of vanities; all is vanity!' And here to-day, in the midst of the boasted progress of this generation, we find cultured men amongst us, lapped in material comfort, and with all the light of this century blazing upon them, preaching again the old Buddhist doctrine that annihilation is the only heaven, and proclaiming that life is not worth living, and that 'it were better not to be.'

Dear brother, one path, and one path only, leads to what all men desire—peace and happiness. One path, and one path only, leads to what all men know they ought to seek—purity and godliness. We are like men in the backwoods, our paths go circling round and round, we have lost our way. 'The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, for he knoweth not how to come to the city.' Jesus Christ has cut a path through the forest. Tread you in it, and you will find that it is 'the way of pleasantness' and 'the path of peace.'

III. And now, one last word. This remarkable designation seems to me to be a witness also to another truth, viz. that in Christianity we have the only way home.

The only way home! All other modes and courses of life and conduct stop at the edge of a great gulf, like some path that goes down an incline to the edge of a precipice, and the heedless traveller that has been going on, not knowing whither it led, tilts over when he comes there. Every other way that men can follow is broken short off by death. And if there were no other reason to allege, that is enough to condemn them. What is a man to do in another world if all his life long he has only cultivated tastes which want this world for their gratification? What is the sensualist to do when he gets there? What is the shrewd man of business in Manchester to do when he comes into a world where there are no bargains, and he cannot go on 'Change on Tuesdays and Fridays? What will he do with himself? What does he do with himself now, when he goes away from home for a month, and does not get his ordinary work and surroundings? What will he do then? What will a young lady do in an other world, who spends her days here in reading trashy novels and magazines? What will any of us do who have set our affections and our tastes upon this poor, perishing, miserable world? Would you think it was common sense in a young man who was going to be a doctor, and took no interest in anything but farming? Is it not as stupid a thing for men and women to train themselves for a condition which is transient, and not to train themselves for the condition into which they are certainly going?

And, on the other hand, the path that Christ makes runs clear on, without a break, across the gulf, like some daring railway bridge thrown across a mountain gorge, and goes straight on on the other side without a curve, only with an upward gradient. The manner of work may change; the spirit of the work and the principles of it will remain. Self-surrender will be the law of Heaven, and 'they shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.' Better to begin here as we mean to end yonder! Better to begin here what we can carry with us, in essence though not in form, into the other life; and so, through all the changes of life, and through the great change of death, to keep one unbroken straight course! 'They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.'

We live in an else trackless waste, but across the desert Jesus Christ has thrown a way; too high for ravenous beasts to spring on or raging foes to storm; too firm for tempest to overthrow or make impassable; too plain for simple hearts to mistake. We may all journey on it, if we will, and 'come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads.'

Christ is the Way. O brother! trust thy sinful soul to His blood and mediation, and thy sins will be forgiven. And then, loving Him, follow Him. 'This is the way; walk ye in it.'

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE EARLY CHURCH

'So the Church throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, was multiplied.'—ACTS ix. 31 (R.V.).

A MAN climbing a hill stops every now and then to take breath and look about him; and in the earlier part of this Book of the Acts of the Apostles there are a number of such landing-places where the writer suspends the course of his narrative, in order to give a general notion of the condition of the Church at the moment. We have in this verse one of the shortest, but perhaps the most significant, of these resting-places. The original and proper reading, instead of 'the Churches,' as our Version has it, reads 'the Church' as a whole—the whole body of believers in the three districts named—Judæa, Galilee, and Samaria—being in the same circumstances and passing through like experiences. The several small communities of disciples formed a whole. They were 'churches' individually; they were collectively 'the Church.' Christ's order of expansion, given in chapter i., had been thus far followed and the sequence here sums up the progress which the Acts has thus far recorded. Galilee had been the cradle of the Church, but the onward march of the Gospel had begun at Jerusalem. Before Luke goes on to tell how the last part of our Lord's programme—'to the uttermost parts of the earth'—began to be carried into execution by the conversion of Cornelius, he gives us this bird's-eye view. To its significant items I desire to draw your attention now.

There are three of them: outward rest, inward progress, outward increase.

I. Outward rest.

'Then had the Church rest throughout all Judæa and Galilee and Samaria.'

The principal persecutor had just been converted, and that would somewhat damp the zeal of his followers. Saul having gone over to the enemy, it would be difficult to go on harrying the Church with the same spirit, when the chief actor was turned traitor. And besides that, historians tell us that there were political complications which gave both Romans and Jews quite enough to do to watch one another, instead of persecuting this little community of Christians. I have nothing to do with these, but this one point I desire to make, that the condition of security and tranquillity in which the Church found itself conduced to spiritual good and growth. This has not always been the case. As one of our quaint divines says, 'as in cities where ground is scarce men build high up, so in times of straitness and persecution the Christian community, and the individuals who compose it, are often raised to a higher level of devotion than in easier and quieter times.' But these primitive Christians utilised this breathing-space in order to grow, and having a moment of lull and stillness in the storm, turned it to the highest and best uses. Is that what you and I do with our quiet times? None of us have any occasion to fear persecution or annoyance of that sort, but there are other thorns in our pillows besides these, and other rough places in our beds, and we are often disturbed in our nests. When there does come a quiet time in which no outward circumstances fret us, do we seize it as coming from God, in order that, with undistracted energies, we may cast ourselves altogether into the work of growing like our Master and doing His will more fully? How many of us, dear brethren, have misused both our adversity and our prosperity by making the one an occasion for deeper worldliness, and the other a reason for forgetting Him in the darkness as in the light? To be absorbed by earthly things, whether by the enjoyment of their possession or by the bitter pain and misery of their withdrawal, is fatal to all our spiritual progress, and only they use things prosperous and things adverse aright, who take them both as means by which they may be wafted nearer to their God. Whatsoever forces act upon us, if we put the helm right and trim the sails as we ought, they will carry us to our haven. And whatsoever forces act upon us, if we neglect the sailor's skill and duty, we shall be washed backwards and forwards in the trough of the sea, and make no progress in the voyage. 'Then had the Church rest'—and grew lazy? 'Then had the Church rest'—and grew worldly? Then was I happy and prosperous and peaceful in my home and in my business, and I said, 'I shall never be moved,' and I forgot my God? 'Then had the Church rest, and was edified.'

Now, in the next place, note the

II. Inward progress.

There are difficulties about the exact relation of the clauses here to one another, the discussion of which would be fitter for a lecture-room than for a pulpit. I do not mean to trouble you with these, but it seems to me that we may perhaps best understand the writer's intention if we throw together the clauses which stand in the middle of this verse, and take them as being a description of the inward progress, being 'edified' and 'walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost.' There are two things, then—the being 'edified' and 'walking'; and I wish to say a word or two about each of them.

Now that word 'edified' and the cognate one 'edification' have been enfeebled in signification so as to mean very much less than they did to Luke. When we speak of 'being edified,' what do we mean? Little more than that we have been instructed, and especially that we have been comforted. And what is the instrument of edification in our ordinary religious parlance? Good words, wise teaching, or pious speech. But the New Testament means vastly more than this by the word, and looks not so much to other people's utterances as to a man's own strenuous efforts, as the means of edification. Much misunderstanding would have been avoided if our translators had really translated, instead of putting us off with a Latinised word which to many readers conveys little meaning and none of the significant metaphor of the original. 'Being edified' sounds very theological and far away from daily life. Would it not sound more real if we read 'being built up'? That is the emblem of the process that ought to go on, not only in the Christian community as a whole, but in every individual member of it. Each Christian is bound to build himself up and to help to build up other

Christians; and God builds them all up by His Spirit. We have brought before us the picture of the rising of some stately fabric upon a firm foundation, course by course, stone by stone, each laid by a separate act of the builder's hand, and carefully bedded in its place until the whole is complete.

That is one emblem of the growth of the Christian community and of the Christian individual, and the other clause that is coupled with it in the text seems to me to give the same idea under a slightly different figure. The rising of a stately building and the advance on a given path suggest substantially the same notion of progress.

And of these two metaphors, I would dwell chiefly on the former, because it is the less familiar of the two to modern readers, and because it is of some consequence to restore it to its weight and true significance in the popular mind. Edification, then, is the building up of Christian character, and it involves four things: a foundation, a continuous progress, a patient, persistent effort, and a completion.

Now, Christian men and women, this is our office for ourselves, and, according to our faculty and opportunities, for the Churches with which we may stand connected, that on the foundation which is Jesus Christ—'and other foundation can no man lay'—we all should slowly, carefully, unceasingly be at our building work; each day's attainment, like the course of stones laid in some great temple, becoming the basis upon which to-morrow's work is to be piled, and each having in it the toil of the builder and being a result and monument of his strenuous effort, and each being built in, according to the plan that the great Architect has given, and each tending a little nearer to the roof-tree, and the time that 'the top stone shall be brought forth with the shout of rejoicing.' Is that a transcript of my life and yours? Do we make a business of the cultivation of Christian character thus? Do we rest the whole structure of our lives upon Jesus Christ? And then, do we, hour by hour, moment by moment, lay the fair stones, until

'Firm and fair the building rise,
A temple to His praise.'

The old worn metaphor, which we have vulgarised and degraded into a synonym for a comfortable condition produced by a brother's words, carries in it the solemnest teaching as to what the duty and privilege of all Christian souls is—to 'build themselves up for an habitation of God through the Spirit.'

But note further the elements of which this progress consists. May we not suppose that both metaphors refer to the clauses that follow, and that 'the fear of the Lord' and 'the comfort of the Holy Ghost' are the particulars in which the Christian is built up and walks?

'The fear of the Lord' is eminently an Old Testament expression, and occurs only once or twice in the New. But its meaning is thoroughly in accordance with the loftiest teaching of the new revelation. 'The fear of the Lord' is that reverential awe of Him, by which we are ever conscious of His presence with us, and ever seek, as our supreme aim and end, to submit our wills to His commandment, and to do the things that are pleasing in His sight. Are you and I building ourselves up in that? Do we feel more thrillingly and gladly to-day than we did yesterday, that God is beside us? And do we submit ourselves more loyally, more easily, more joyously to His will, in blessed obedience, now than ever before? Have we learned, and are we learning, moment by moment, more of that 'secret of the Lord' which 'is with them that fear Him,' and of that 'covenant' which 'He will show' to them? Unless we do, our growth in Christian character is a very doubtful thing. And are we advancing, too, in that other element which so beautifully completes and softens the notion of the fear of the Lord, 'the encouragement' which the divine Spirit gives us? Are we bolder to-day than we were yesterday? Are we ready to meet with more undaunted confidence whatever we may have to face? Do we feel ever increasing within us the full blessedness and inspiration of that divine visitant? And do these sweet communications take all the 'torment' away from 'fear,' and leave only the bliss of reverential love? They who walk in the fear of the Lord, and who with the fear have the courage that the divine Spirit gives, will 'have rest,' like the first Christians, whatsoever storms may howl around them, and whatsoever enemies may threaten to disturb their peace.

And so, lastly, note

III. The outward growth.

Thus building themselves up, and thus growing, the Church 'was multiplied.' Of course it was. Christian men and women that are spiritually alive, and who, because they are alive, grow, and grow in these things, the manifest reverence of God, and the manifest 'comfort' of the divine Spirit's giving, will commend their gospel to a blind world. They will be an attractive force in the midst of men, and their inward growth will make them eager to hold forth the word of life, and will give them 'a mouth and wisdom' which nothing but genuine spiritual experience can give.

And so, dear friends, especially those of you who set yourselves to any of the many forms of Christian work which prevail in this day, learn the lesson of my text, and make sure of '*a*' before you go on to '*b*,' and see to it that before you set yourselves to try to multiply the Church, you set yourselves to build up yourselves in your most holy faith.

We hear a great deal nowadays about 'forward movements,' and I sympathise with all that is said in favour of them. But I would remind you that the precursor of every genuine forward movement is a Godward movement, and that it is worse than useless to talk about lengthening the cords unless you begin with strengthening the stakes. The little prop that holds up the bell-tent that will contain half-a-dozen soldiers will be all too weak for the great one that will cover a company. And the fault of some Christian people is that they set themselves to work upon others without remembering that the first requisite is a deepened and growing godliness and devotion in their own souls. Dear friends, begin at home, and remember that whilst what the world calls eloquence *may* draw people, and oddities *will* draw them, and all sorts of lower attractions will gather multitudes for a little while, the one solid power which Christian men and women can exercise for the numerical increase of the Church is rooted in, and only tenable through, their own personal increase day by day in consecration and likeness to the Saviour, in possession of the Spirit, and in loving fear of the Lord.

COPIES OF CHRIST'S MANNER

'And Peter said unto him, Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. . . . 40. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down and prayed; and, turning him to the body, said, Tabitha, arise.'—ACTS ix. 34, 40.

I HAVE put these two miracles together, not only because they were closely connected in time and place, but because they have a very remarkable and instructive feature in common. They are both evidently moulded upon Christ's miracles; are distinct imitations of what Peter had seen Him do. And their likenesses to and differences from our Lord's manner of working are equally noteworthy. It is to the lessons from these two aspects, common to both miracles, that I desire to turn now.

I. First, notice the similarities and the lesson which they teach.

The two cases before us are alike, in that both of them find parallels in our Lord's miracles. The one is the cure of a paralytic, which pairs off with the well-known story in the Gospels concerning the man that was borne by four, and let down through the roof into Christ's presence. The other of them, the raising of Dorcas, or Tabitha, of course corresponds with the three resurrections of dead people which are recorded in the Gospels.

And now, note the likenesses. Jesus Christ said to the paralysed man, 'Arise, take up thy bed.' Peter says to Æneas, 'Arise, and make thy bed.' The one command was appropriate to the circumstances of a man who was not in his own house, and whose control over his long-disused muscles in obeying Christ's word was a confirmation to himself of the reality and completeness of his cure. The other was appropriate to a man bedridden in his own house; and it had precisely the same purpose as the analogous injunction from our Lord, 'Take up thy bed and walk.' Æneas was lying at home, and so Peter, remembering how Jesus Christ had demonstrated to others, and affirmed to the man himself, the reality of the miraculous blessing given to him, copies his Master's method, 'Æneas, make thy bed.' It is an echo and resemblance of the former incident, and is a distinct piece of imitation of it.

And then, if we turn to the other narrative, the intentional moulding of the manner of the miracle, consecrated in the eyes of the loving disciple, because it was Christ's manner, is still more obvious. When Jesus Christ went into the house of Jairus there was the usual hubbub, the noise of the loud Eastern mourning, and He put them all forth, taking with Him only the father and mother of the damsel, and Peter with James and John. When Peter goes into the upper room, where Tabitha is lying, there are the usual noise of lamentation and the clack of many tongues, extolling the virtues of the dead woman. He remembers how Christ had gone about His miracle, and he, in his turn, 'put them all forth.' Mark, who was Peter's mouthpiece in his Gospel, gives us the very Aramaic words which our Lord employed when He raised the little girl, *Talitha*, the Aramaic word for 'a damsel,' or young girl; *cumi*, which means in that language 'arise.' Is it not singular and beautiful that Peter's word by the bedside of the dead Dorcas is, with the exception of one letter, absolutely identical? Christ says, *Talitha cumi*. Peter remembered the formula by which the blessing was conveyed, and he copied it. 'Tabitha cumi!' Is it not clear that he is posing after his Master's attitude; that he is, consciously or unconsciously, doing what he remembered so well had been done in that other upper room, and that the miracles are both of them shaped after the pattern of the miraculous working of Jesus Christ?

Well, now, although we are no miracle-workers, the very same principle which underlay these two works of supernatural power is to be applied to all our work, and to our lives as Christian people. I do not know whether Peter *meant* to do like Jesus Christ or not; I think rather that he was unconsciously and instinctively dropping into the fashion that to him was so sacred. Love always delights in imitation; and the disciples of a great teacher will unconsciously catch the trick of his intonation, even the awkwardness of his attitudes or the peculiarities of his way of looking at things—only, unfortunately, outsides are a good deal more easily imitated than insides. And many a disciple copies such external trifles, and talks in the tones that have, first of all, brought blessed truths to him, whose resemblance to his teacher goes very little further. The principle that underlies these miracles is just this—get near Jesus Christ, and you will catch His manner. Dwell in fellowship with Him, and whether you are thinking about it or not, there will come some faint resemblance to that Lord into your characters and your way of doing things, so that men will 'take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus.' The poor bit of cloth which has held some precious piece of solid perfume will retain fragrance for many a day afterwards, and will bless the scentless air by giving it forth. The man who keeps close to Christ, and has folded Him in his heart, will, like the poor cloth, give forth a sweetness not his own that will gladden and refresh many nostrils. Live in the light, and you will become light. Keep near Christ, and you will be Christlike. Love Him, and love will do to you what it does to many a wedded pair, and to many kindred hearts: it will transfuse into you something of the characteristics of the object of your love. It is impossible to trust Christ, to obey Christ, to hold communion with Him, and to live beside Him, without becoming like Him. And if such be our inward experience, so will be our outward appearance.

But there may be a specific point given to this lesson in regard to Christian people's ways of doing their work in the world and helping and blessing other folk. Although, as I say, we have no miraculous power at our disposal, we do not need it in order to manifest Jesus Christ and His way of working in our work. And if we dwell beside Him, then, depend upon it, all the characteristics—far more precious than the accidents of manner, or tone, or attitude in working a miracle—all the characteristics so deeply and blessedly stamped upon His life of self-sacrifice and man-helping devotion will be reproduced in us. Jesus Christ, when He went through the wards of the hospital of the world, was overflowing with quick sympathy for every sorrow that met His eye. If you and I are living near Him, we shall never steel our hearts nor lock up our sensibilities against any suffering that it is within our power to stanch or to alleviate. Jesus Christ never grudged trouble, never thought of Himself, never was impatient of interruption, never repelled importunity, never sent away empty any outstretched hand. And if we live near Him, self-oblivious willingness to spend and be spent will mark our lives, and we shall not consider that we have the right of possession or of sole enjoyment of any of the blessings that are given to us. Jesus Christ, according to the beautiful and significant words of one of the Gospels, 'healed them that had need of healing.' Why that singular designation for the people that were standing around Him but to teach us that wide as men's necessity was His sympathy, and that broad as the sympathy of Christ were the help and healing which He brought? And so, with like width of compassion, with like perfectness of self-oblivion, with equal remoteness from consciousness of superiority or display of condescension, Christian men should go amongst the sorrowful and the sad and the outcast and do their miracles—'greater works' than those which Christ did, as He Himself has told us—after the manner in which He did His. If they did, the world would be a different place, and the Church would be a different Church, and you would not have people writing in the newspapers to demonstrate that Christianity was 'played out.'

II. Further, note the differences and the lessons from them.

Take the first of the two miracles. 'Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed.' That first clause points to the great difference. Take the second miracle, 'Jesus Christ put them all forth, and stretched out His hand, and said, Damsel, arise!' 'Peter put them all forth, . . . and said, Tabitha, arise!' but between the putting forth and the miracle he did something which Christ did not do, and he did not do something which Christ did do. 'He kneeled down and prayed.' Jesus Christ did not do that. 'And Jesus put forth His hand, and said, Arise!' Peter did not do that. But he put forth his hand *after* the miracle was wrought; not to communicate life, but to help the living woman to get to her feet; and so, both by what he did in his prayer and by what he did not do after Christ's pattern, the extension of the hand that was the channel of the vitality, he drew a broad distinction between the servant's copy and the Master's original.

The lessons from the differences are such as the following.

Christ works miracles by His inherent power; His servants do their works only as His instruments and organs. I need not dwell upon the former thought; but it is the latter at which I wish to look for a moment. The lesson, then, of the difference is that Christian men, in all their work for the Master and for the world, are ever to keep clear before themselves, and to make very obvious to other people, that they are nothing more than channels and instruments. The less the preacher, the teacher, the Christian benefactor of any sort puts himself in the foreground, or in evidence at all, the more likely are his words and works to be successful. If you hear a man, for instance, preaching a sermon, and you see that he is thinking about himself, he may talk with the tongues of men and of angels, but he will do no good to anybody. The first condition of work for the Lord is—hide yourself behind your message, behind your Master, and make it very plain that His is the power, and that you are but a tool in the Workman's hand.

And then, further, another lesson is, Be very sure of the power that will work in you. What a piece of audacity it was for Peter to go and stand by the paralytic man's couch and say, 'Æneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.' Yes, audacity; unless he had been in such constant and close touch with his Master that he was sure that his Master was working through him. And is it not beautiful to see how absolutely confident he is that Jesus Christ's work was not ended when He went up into heaven; but that there, in that little stuffy room, where the man had lain motionless for eight long years, Jesus Christ was present, and working? O brethren, the Christian Church does not half enough believe in the actual presence and operation of Jesus Christ, here and now, in and through all His servants! We are ready enough to believe that He worked when He was in the world long ago, that He is going to work when He comes back to the world, at some far-off future period. But do we believe that He is verily putting forth His power, in no metaphor, but in simple reality, at present and here, and, if we will, through us?

'Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.' Be sure that if you keep near Christ, if you will try to mould yourselves after His likeness, if you expect Him to work through you, and do not hinder His work by self-conceit and self-consciousness of any sort, then it will be no presumption, but simple faith which He delights in and will vindicate, if you, too, go and stand by a paralytic and say, 'Jesus Christ maketh thee whole,' or go and stand by people dead in trespasses and sins and say, after you have prayed, 'Arise.'

We are here for the very purpose for which Peter was in Lydda and Joppa—to carry on and copy the healing and the quickening work of Christ, by His present power, and after His blessed example.

WHAT GOD HATH CLEANSED

'There was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2. A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. 3. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 4. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. 5. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6. He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. 7. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. 9. On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: 10. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 11. And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12. Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. 17. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18. And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. 19. While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing; for I have sent them.'—Acts x. 1-20.

The Church was at first in appearance only a Jewish sect; but the great stride is now to be taken which carries it over the border into the Gentile world, and begins its universal aspect. If we consider the magnitude of the change, and the difficulties of training and prejudice which it had to encounter in the Church itself, we shall not wonder at the abundance of supernatural occurrences which attended it. Without some such impulse, it is difficult to conceive of its having been accomplished.

In this narrative we see the supernatural preparation on both sides. God, as it were, lays His right hand on Cornelius, and His left on Peter, and impels them towards each other. Philip had already preached to the Ethiopian, and probably the anonymous brethren in Acts xi. 20 had already spoken the word to pure Greeks at Antioch; but the importance of Peter's action here is that by reason of his Apostleship, his recognition of Gentile Christians becomes the act of the whole community. His entrance into Cornelius's house ended the Jewish phase of the Church. The epoch was worthy of divine intervention, and the step needed divine warrant. Therefore the abundance of miracle at this point is not superfluous.

I. We have the vision which guided the seeker to the light. Cæsarea, as the seat of government, was the focus of Gentilism, and that the Gospel should effect a lodgment there was significant. Still more so was the person whom it first won,—an officer of the Roman army, the very emblem of worldly power, loathed by every true Jew. A centurion was not an officer of high rank, but Cornelius's name suggests the possibility of his connection with a famous Roman family, and the name of the 'band' or 'cohort,' of which his troop was part, suggests that it was raised in Italy, and therefore properly officered by Romans. His residence in Judæa had touched his spirit with some knowledge of, and reverence for, the Jehovah whom this strange people worshipped. He was one of a class numerous in these times of religious unrest, who had been more or less affected by the pure monotheism of the Jew.

It is remarkable that the centurions of the New Testament are all more or less favourably inclined towards Christ and Christianity, and the fact has been laid hold of to throw doubt on the narratives; but it is very natural that similarity of position and training should have produced similarity of thought; and that three or four such persons should have come in contact with Jesus and His Apostles makes no violent demands on probability, while there was no occasion to mention others who were not like-minded. Quartered for considerable periods in the country, and brought into close contact with its religion, and profoundly sceptical of their own, as all but the lowest minds then were, Cornelius and his brother in arms and spirit whose faith drew wondering praise from Jesus, are bright examples of the possibility of earnest religious life being nourished amid grave disadvantages, and preach a lesson, often neglected, that we should be slow to form unfavourable opinions of classes of men, or to decide that those of such and such a profession, or in such and such circumstances, must be of such and such a character.

It would have seemed that the last place to look for the first Gentile Christian would have been in the barracks at Cæsarea; and yet there God's angel went for him, and found him. It has often been discussed whether Cornelius was a 'proselyte' or not. It matters very little. He was drawn to the Jews' religion, had adopted their hours of prayer, reverenced their God, had therefore cast off idolatry, gave alms to the people as acknowledgment that their God was his God, and cultivated habitual devotion, which he had diffused among his household, both of slaves and soldiers. It is a beautiful picture of a soul feeling after a deeper knowledge of God, as a plant turns its half-opened flowers to the sun.

Such seekers do not grope without touching. It is not only 'unto the seed of Jacob' that God has never said

'Seek ye Me in vain.' The story has a message of hope to all such seekers, and sheds precious light on dark problems in regard to the relation of such souls in heathen lands to the light and love of God. The vision appeared to Cornelius in the manner corresponding to his spiritual susceptibility, and it came at the hour of prayer. God's angels ever draw near to hearts opened by desire to receive them. Not in visible form, but in reality, 'bright-harnessed angels stand' all around the chamber where prayer is made. Our hours of supplication are God's hours of communication.

The vision to Cornelius is not to be whittled down to a mental impression. It was an objective, supernatural appearance,—whether to sense or soul matters little. The story gives most graphically the fixed gaze of terror which Cornelius fastened on the angel, and very characteristically the immediate recovery and quick question to which his courage and military promptitude helped him. 'What is it, Lord?' does not speak of terror, but of readiness to take orders and obey. 'Lord' seems to be but a title of reverence here.

In the angel's answer, the order in which prayers and alms are named is the reverse of that in verse 2. Luke speaks as a man, beginning with the visible manifestation, and passing thence to the inward devotion which animated the external beneficence. The angel speaks as God sees, beginning with the inward, and descending to the outward. The strong 'anthropomorphism' of the representation that man's prayer and alms keep God in mind of him needs no vindication and little explanation. It substitutes the mental state which in us originates certain acts for the acts themselves. God's 'remembrance' is in Scripture frequently used to express His loving deeds, which show that their recipient is not forgotten of Him.

But the all-important truth in the words is that the prayers and alms (coming from a devout heart) of a man who had never heard of Jesus Christ were acceptable to God. None the less Cornelius needed Jesus, and the recompense made to him was the knowledge of the Saviour. The belief that in many a heathen heart such yearning after a dimly known God has stretched itself towards light, and been accepted of God, does not in the least conflict with the truth that 'there is none other Name given among men, whereby we must be saved,' but it sheds a bright and most welcome light of hope into that awful darkness. Christ is the only Saviour, but it is not for us to say how far off from the channel in which it flows the water of life may percolate, and feed the roots of distant trees. Cornelius's religion was not a substitute for Christ, but was the occasion of his being led to Christ, and finding full, conscious salvation there. God leads seeking souls by His own wonderful ways; and we may leave all such in His hand, assured that no heart ever hungered after righteousness and was not filled.

The instruction to send for Peter tested Cornelius's willingness to be taught by an unknown Jew, and his belief in the divine origin of the vision. The direction given by which to find this teacher was not promising. A lodger in a tan-yard by the seaside was certainly not a man of position or wealth. But military discipline helped religious reverence; and without delay, as soon as the angel 'was departed' (an expression which gives the outward reality of the appearance strongly), Cornelius's confidential servants, sympathisers with him in his religion, were told all the story, and before nightfall were on their march to Joppa. Swift obedience to whatever God points out as our path towards the light, even if it seem somewhat unattractive, will always mark our conduct if we really long for the light, and believe that He is pointing our way.

II. The vision which guided the light-bearer to the seeker.—All through the night the messengers marched along the maritime plain in which both Cæsarea and Joppa lay, much discussing, no doubt, their strange errand, and wondering what they would find. The preparation of Peter, which was as needful as that of Cornelius, was so timed as to be completed just as the messengers stood at the tanner's door.

The first point to note in regard to it is its scene. It is of subordinate importance, but it can scarcely have been entirely unmeaning, that the flashing waters of the Mediterranean, blazing in midday sunshine, stretched before Peter's eyes as he sat on the housetop 'by the seaside.' His thoughts may have travelled across the sea, and he may have wondered what lay beyond the horizon, and whether there were men there to whom Christ's commission extended. 'The isles' of which prophecy had told that they should 'wait for His law' were away out in the mysterious distance. Some expansion of spirit towards regions beyond may have accompanied his gaze. At all events, it was by the shore of the great highway of nations and of truth that the vision which revealed that all men were 'cleansed' filled the eye and heart of the Apostle, and told him that, in his calling as 'fisher of men,' a wider water than the land-locked Sea of Galilee was his.

We may also note the connection of the form of the vision with his circumstances. His hunger determined its shape. The natural bodily sensations coloured his state of mind even in trance, and afforded the point of contact for God's message. It does not follow that the vision was only the consequence of his hunger, as has been suggested by critics who wish to get rid of the supernatural. But the form which it took teaches us how mercifully God is wont to mould His communications according to our needs, and how wisely He shapes them, so as to find entrance through even the lower wants. The commonest bodily needs may become avenues for His truth, if our prayer accompanies our hunger.

The significance of the vision is plain to us, though Peter was 'much perplexed' about it. In the light of the event, we understand that the 'great sheet let down from heaven by four corners,' and containing all manner of creatures, is the symbol of universal humanity (to use modern language). The four corners correspond to the four points of the compass,—north, south, east, and west,—the contents to the swarming millions of men. Peter would perceive no more in the command to 'kill and eat' than the abrogation of Mosaic restrictions. Meditation was needful to disclose the full extent of the revolution shadowed by the vision and its accompanying words. The old nature of Peter was not so completely changed but that a flash of it breaks out still. The same self-confidence which had led him to 'rebuke' Jesus, and to say, 'This shall not be unto Thee,' speaks in his unhesitating and irreverent 'Not so, Lord!'

The naïve reason he gives for not obeying—namely, his never having done as he was now bid to do—is charmingly illogical and human. God tells him to do a new thing, and his reason for not doing it is that it is new. Use and wont are set up by us all against the fresh disclosures of God's will. The command to kill and eat was not repeated. It was but the introduction to the truth which was repeated thrice, the same number of times as Peter had denied his Master and had received his charge to feed His sheep.

That great truth has manifold applications, but its direct purpose as regards Peter is to teach that all restrictions which differentiated Jew from Gentile are abolished. 'Cleansing' does not here apply to moral purifying, but to the admission of all mankind to the same standing as the Jew. Therefore the Gospel is to be preached to all men, and the Jewish Christian has no pre-eminence.

Peter's perplexity as to the meaning of the vision is very intelligible. It was not so plain as to carry its own interpretation, but, like most other of God's teachings, was explained by circumstances. What was next done made the best commentary on what had just been beheld. While patient reflection is necessary to do due honour to God's teachings and to discover their bearing on events, it is generally true that events unfold their significance as meditation alone never can. Life is the best commentator on God's word. The three men down at the door poured light on the vision on the housetop. But the explanation was not left to circumstances. The Spirit directed Peter to go with the messengers, and thus taught him the meaning of the enigmatical words which he had heard from heaven.

It is to be remembered that the Apostle had no need of fresh illumination as to the world-wide preaching of the Gospel. Christ's commission to 'the uttermost parts of the earth' ever rang in his ears, as we may be sure. But what he did need was the lesson that the Gentiles could come into the Church without going through the gate of Judaism. If all peculiar sanctity was gone from the Jew, and all men shared in the 'cleansing,' there was no need for keeping up any of the old restrictions, or insisting on Gentiles being first received into the Israelitish community as a stage in their progress towards Christianity.

It took Peter and the others years to digest the lesson given on the housetop, but he began to put it in practice that day. How little he knew the sweep of the truth then declared to him! How little we have learned it yet! All exclusiveness which looks down on classes or races, all monkish asceticism which taboos natural appetites and tastes, all morbid scrupulosity which shuts out from religious men large fields of life, all Pharisaism which says 'The temple of the Lord are we,' are smitten to dust by the great words which gather all men into the same ample, impartial divine love, and, in another aspect, give Christian culture and life the charter of freest use of all God's fair world, and place the distinction between clean and unclean in the spirit of the user rather than in the thing used. 'Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled . . . is nothing pure.'

'GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS'

'And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31. And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 32. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea-side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. 33. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. 34. Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35. But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. 36. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all:) 37. That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judæa, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him. 39. And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: 40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly; 41. Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead. 42. And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. 43. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His Name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins. 44. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.'—ACTS x. 30-44.

THIS passage falls into three parts: Cornelius's explanation, Peter's sermon, and the descent of the Spirit on the new converts. The last is the most important, and yet is told most briefly. We may surely recognise the influence of Peter's personal reminiscences in the scale of the narrative, and may remember that Luke and Mark were thrown together in later days.

I. Cornelius repeats what his messengers had already told Peter, but in fuller detail. He tells how he was occupied when the angel appeared. He was keeping the Jewish hour of prayer, and the fact that the vision came to him as he prayed had attested to him its heavenly origin. If we would see angels, the most likely place to behold them is in the secret place of prayer. He tells, too, that the command to send for Peter was a consequence of God's remembrance of his prayer ('therefore,' verse 32). His prayers and alms showed that he was 'of the light,' and therefore he was directed to what would yield further light.

The command to send for Peter is noteworthy in two respects. It was, first, a test of humility and obedience. Cornelius, as a Roman officer, would be tempted to feel the usual contempt for one of the subject race, and, unless his eagerness to know more of God's will overbore his pride, to kick at the idea of sending to beg the favour of the presence and instruction of a Jew, and of one, too, who could find no better quarters than a tanner's house. The angel's voice commanded, but it did not compel. Cornelius bore the test, and neither waived aside the vision as a hallucination to which it was absurd for a practical man to attend, nor recoiled from the lowliness of the proposed teacher. He pocketed official and racial loftiness, and, as he emphasises, 'forthwith' despatched his message. It was as if an English official in the Punjab had been sent to a Sikh 'Guru' for teaching.

The other remarkable point about the command is that Philip was probably in Cæsarea at the time. Why should Peter have been brought, then, by two visions and two long journeys? The subsequent history explains why. For the storm of criticism in the Jerusalem church provoked by Cornelius's baptism would have raged with tenfold fury if so revolutionary an act had been done by any less authoritative person than the leader of the Apostles. The Lord would stamp His own approval on the deed which marked so great an expansion of the Church, and therefore He makes the first of the Apostles His agent, and that by a double vision.

'Thou hast well done that thou art come,'—a courteous welcome, with just a trace of the doubt which had occupied Cornelius during the 'four days,' whether this unknown Jew would obey so strange an invitation. Courtesy and preparedness to receive the unknown message beautifully blend in Cornelius's closing words, which do not directly ask Peter to speak, but declare the auditors' eagerness to hear, as well as their confidence that what he says will be God's voice.

A variant reading in verse 33 gives 'in thy sight' for 'in the sight of God,' and has much to recommend it. But in any case we have here the right attitude for us all in the presence of the uttered will and mind of God. Where such open-eared and open-hearted preparedness marks the listeners, feebler teachers than Peter will win converts. The reason why much earnest Christian teaching is vain is the indifference and non-expectant attitude of the hearers, who are not hearkeners. Seed thrown on the wayside is picked up by the birds.

II. Peter's sermon is, on the whole, much like his other addresses which are abundantly reported in the early part of the Acts. The great business of the preachers then was to tell the history of Jesus. Christianity is, first, a recital of historical events, from which, no doubt, principles are deduced, and which necessarily lead on to doctrines; but the facts are first.

But the familiar story is told to Cornelius with some variation of tone. And it is prefaced by a great word, which crystallises the large truth that had sprung into consciousness and startling power in Peter, as the result of his own and Cornelius's experience. He had not previously thought of God as 'a respecter of persons,' but the conviction that He was not had never blazed with such sun-clearness before him as it did now. Jewish narrowness had, unconsciously to himself, somewhat clouded it; but these four days had burned in on him, as if it were a new truth, that 'in every nation' there may be men accepted of God, because they 'fear Him and work righteousness.'

That great saying is twisted from its right meaning when it is interpreted as discouraging the efforts of Christians to carry the Gospel to the heathen; for, if the 'light of nature' is sufficient, what was Peter sent to Cæsarea for? But it is no less maltreated when evangelical Christians fail to grasp its world-wide significance, or doubt that in lands where Christ's name has not been proclaimed there are souls groping for the light, and seeking to obey the law written on their hearts. That there are such, and that such are 'accepted of Him,' and led by His own ways to the fuller light, is obviously taught in these words, and should be a welcome thought to us all.

The tangled utterances which immediately follow, sound as if speech staggered under the weight of the thoughts opening before the speaker. Whatever difficulty attends the construction, the intention is clear, —to contrast the limited scope of the message, as confined to the children of Israel, with its universal destination as now made clear. The statement which in the Authorised and Revised Versions is thrown into a parenthesis is really the very centre of the Apostle's thought. Jesus, who has hitherto been preached to Israel, is 'Lord of all,' and the message concerning Him is now to be proclaimed, not in vague outline and at second hand, as it had hitherto reached Cornelius, but in full detail, and as a message in which he was concerned.

Contrast the beginning and the ending of the discourse,—'the word sent unto the children of Israel' and 'every one that believeth on Him shall receive remission of sins.' A remarkable variation in the text is suggested by Blass in his striking commentary, who would omit 'Lord' and read, 'The word which He sent to the children of Israel, bringing the good tidings of peace through Jesus Christ,—this [word] belongs to all.' That reading does away with the chief difficulties, and brings out clearly the thought which is more obscurely expressed in a contorted sentence by the present reading.

The subsequent *résumé* of the life of Jesus is substantially the same as is found in Peter's other sermons. But we may note that the highest conceptions of our Lord's nature are not stated. It is hard to suppose that Peter after Pentecost had not the same conviction as burned in his confession, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' But in these early discourses neither the Divinity and Incarnation nor the atoning sacrifice of Jesus is set forth. He is the Christ, 'anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.' God is with Him (Nicodemus had got as far as that). He is 'ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead.'

We note, too, that His teaching is not touched upon, nor any of the profounder aspects of His work as the Revealer of God, but His beneficence and miraculous deliverances of devil-ridden men. His death is declared, but without any of the accusations of His murderers, which, like lance-thrusts, 'pricked' Jewish hearers. Nor is the efficacy of that death as the sacrifice for the world's sin touched upon, but it is simply told as a fact, and set in contrast with the Resurrection. These were the plain facts which had first to be accepted.

The only way of establishing facts is by evidence of eye-witnesses. So Peter twice (verses 39, 41) adduces his own and his colleagues' evidence. But the facts are not yet a gospel, unless they are further explained as well as established. Did such things happen? The answer is, 'We saw them.' What did they mean? The answer begins by adducing the 'witness' of the Apostles to a different order of truths, which requires a different sort of witness. Jesus had bidden them 'testify' that He is to be Judge of living and dead; that is, of all mankind. Their witness to that can only rest on His word.

Nor is that all. There is yet another body of 'witnesses' to yet another class of truths. 'All the prophets' bear witness to the great truth which makes the biography of the Man the gospel for all men,—that the deepest want of all men is satisfied through the name which Peter ever rang out as all-powerful to heal and bless. The forgiveness of sins through the manifested character and work of Jesus Christ is given on condition of faith to any and every one who believes, be he Jew or Gentile, Galilean fisherman or Roman centurion. Cornelius may have known little of the prophets, but he knew the burden of sin. He did not know all that we know of Jesus, and of the way in which forgiveness is connected with His work, but *he* did know now that it was connected, and that this Jesus was risen from the dead, and was to be the Judge. His faith went out to that Saviour, and as he heard he believed.

III. Therefore the great gift, attesting the divine acceptance of him and the rest of the hearers, came at once. There had been no confession of their faith, much less had there been baptism, or laying on of Apostolic hands. The sole qualification and condition for the reception of the Spirit which John lays down in his Gospel when he speaks of the 'Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive,' was present here, and it was enough. Peter and his brethren might have hesitated about baptizing an uncircumcised believer. The Lord of the Church showed Peter that He did not hesitate.

So, like a true disciple, Peter followed Christ's lead, and though 'they of the circumcision' were struck with amazement, he said to himself, 'Who am I, that I should withstand God?' and opened his heart to welcome these new converts as possessors of 'like precious faith,' as was demonstrated by their possession of the same Spirit. Would that Peter's willingness to recognise all who manifest the Spirit of Christ, whatever their relation to ecclesiastical regulations, had continued the law and practice of the Church!

PETER'S APOLOGIA

'And the apostles and brethren that were in Judæa heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3. Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. 4. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, 5. I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 6. Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 7. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay, and eat. 8. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. 9. But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 10. And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11. And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me. 12. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: 13. And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14. Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. 15. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 18. When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.'—ACTS xi. 1-18.

PETER'S action in regard to Cornelius precipitated a controversy which was bound to come if the Church was to be anything more than a Jewish sect. It brought to light the first tendency to form a party in the Church. 'They . . . of the circumcision' were probably 'certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed,' and were especially zealous for all the separating prescriptions of the ceremonial law. They were scarcely a party as yet, but the little rift was destined to grow, and they became Paul's bitterest opponents through all his life, dogging him with calumnies and counterworking his toil. It is a black day for a Church when differences of opinion lead to the formation of cliques. Zeal for truth is sadly apt to enlist spite, malice, and blindness to a manifest work of God, as its allies.

Poor Peter, no doubt, expected that the brethren would rejoice with him in the extension of the Gospel to 'the Gentiles,' but his reception in Jerusalem was very unlike his hopes. The critics did not venture to cavil at his preaching to Gentiles. Probably none of them had any objection to such being welcomed into the Church, for they can scarcely have wished to make the door into it narrower than that into the synagogue, but they insisted that there was no way in but through the synagogue. By all means, said they, let Gentiles come, but they must first become Jews, by submitting to circumcision and living as Jews do. Thus they did not attack Peter for preaching to the Roman centurion and his men, but for eating with them. That eating not only was a breach of the law, but it implied the reception of Cornelius and his company into the household of God, and so destroyed the whole fabric of Jewish exclusiveness. We condemn such narrowness, but do many of us not practise it in other forms? Wherever Christians demand adoption of external usages, over and above exercise of penitent faith, as a condition of brotherly recognition, they are walking in the steps of them 'of the circumcision.'

Peter's answer to the critics is the true answer to all similar hedging up of the Church, for he contents himself with showing that he was only following God's action in every step of the way which he took, and that God, by the gift of the divine Spirit, had shown that He had taken these uncircumcised men into His fellowship, before Peter dared to 'eat with them.' He points to four facts which show God's hand in the matter, and thinks that he has done enough to vindicate himself thereby. The first is his vision on the housetop. He tells that he was praying when it came, and what God shows to a praying spirit is not likely to mislead. He tells that he was 'in a trance,'—a condition in which prophets had of old received their commands. That again was a guarantee for the divine origin of the vision in the eyes of every Jew, though nowadays it is taken by anti-supernaturalists as a demonstration of its morbidness and unreliableness. He tells of his reluctance to obey the command to 'kill and eat.' A flash of the old brusque spirit impelled his flat refusal, 'Not so, Lord!' and his daring to argue with his Lord still, as he had done with Him on earth. He tells of the interpreting and revolutionary word, evoked by his audacious objection, and then he tells how 'this was done thrice,' so that there could be no mistake in his remembrance of it, and then that the whole was drawn up into heaven,—a sign that the purpose of the vision was accomplished when that word was spoken. What, then, was the meaning of it?

Clearly it swept away at once the legal distinction of clean and unclean meats, and of it, too, may be spoken what Mark, Peter's mouthpiece, writes of earthly words of Christ's: 'This He said, making all meats clean.' But with the sweeping away of that distinction much else goes, for it necessarily involves the abrogation of the whole separating ordinances of the law, and of the distinction between clean and unclean persons. Its wider application was not seen at the moment, but it flashed on him, no doubt, when face to face with Cornelius. God had cleansed him, in that his prayers had 'gone up for a memorial before God,' and so Peter saw that 'in every nation,' and not among Jews only, there might be men cleansed by God. What was true of Cornelius must be true of many others. So the whole distinction between Jew and Gentile was cut up by the roots. Little did Peter know the width of the principle revealed to him then, as all of us know but little of the full application of many truths which we believe. But he obeyed so much of the command as he understood, and more of it gradually dawned on his mind, as will always be the case if we obey what we know.

The second fact was the coincident arrival of the messengers and the distinct command to accompany them. Peter could distinguish quite assuredly his own thoughts from divine instructions, as his account of the dialogue in the trance shows. How he distinguished is not told; that he distinguished is. The coincidence in time clearly pointed to one divine hand working at both ends of the line,—Cæsarea and Joppa. It interpreted the vision which had 'much perplexed' Peter as to what it 'might mean.' But he was not left to interpret it by his own pondering. The Spirit spoke authoritatively, and the whole force of his justification of himself depends on the fact that he knew that the impulse which made him set out to Cæsarea was not his own. If the reading of the Revised Version is adopted in verse 12, 'making no distinction,' the command plainly referred to the vision, and showed Peter that he was to make no distinction of 'clean and unclean' in his intercourse with these Gentiles.

The third fact is the vision to Cornelius, of which he was told on arriving. The two visions fitted into each other, confirmed each other, interpreted each other. We may estimate the greatness of the step in the development of the Church which the admission of Cornelius into it made, and the obstacles on both sides, by the fact that both visions were needed to bring these two men together. Peter would never have dreamed of going with the messengers if he had not had his narrowness beaten out of him on the housetop, and Cornelius would never have dreamed of sending to Joppa if he had not seen the angel. The cleft between Jew and Gentile was so wide that God's hand had to be applied on both sides to press the separated parts together. He had plainly done it, and that was Peter's defence.

The fourth fact is the gift of the Spirit to these Gentiles. That is the crown of Peter's vindication, and his question, 'Who was I, that I could withstand God?' might be profitably pondered and applied by those whose ecclesiastical theories oblige them to deny the 'orders' and the 'validity of the sacraments,' and the very name of a Church, to bodies of Christians who do not conform to their polity. If God, by the gift of His Spirit manifest in its fruits, owns them, they have the true 'notes of the Church,' and 'they of the circumcision' who recoil from recognising them do themselves more harm thereby than they inflict on these. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God,' even though some brother may be 'angry' that the Father welcomes them.

THE FIRST PREACHING AT ANTIOCH

'And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.'—Acts xi. 20, 21.

Thus simply does the historian tell one of the greatest events in the history of the Church. How great it was will appear if we observe that the weight of authority among critics and commentators sees here an extension of the message of salvation to Greeks, that is, to pure heathens, and not a mere preaching to Hellenists, that is, to Greek-speaking Jews born outside Palestine.

If that be correct, this was a great stride forward in the development of the Church. It needed a vision to overcome the scruples of Peter, and impel him to the bold innovation of preaching to Cornelius and his household, and, as we know, his doing so gave grave offence to some of his brethren in Jerusalem. But in the case before us, some Cypriote and African Jews—men of no note in the Church, whose very names have perished, with no official among them, with no vision nor command to impel them, with no precedent to encourage them, with nothing but the truth in their minds and the impulses of Christ's love in their hearts—solve the problem of the extension of Christ's message to the heathen, and, quite unconscious of the greatness of their act, do the thing about the propriety of which there had been such serious question in Jerusalem.

This boldness becomes even more remarkable if we notice that the incident of our text may have taken place before Peter's visit to Cornelius. The verse before our text, 'They which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled, . . . preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only,' is almost a *verbatim* repetition of words in an earlier chapter, and evidently suggests that the writer is returning to that point of time, in order to take up another thread of his narrative contemporaneous with those already pursued. If so, three distinct lines of expansion appear to have started from the dispersion of the Jerusalem church in the persecution—namely, Philip's mission to Samaria, Peter's to Cornelius, and this work in Antioch. Whether prior in time or no, the preaching in the latter city was plainly quite independent of the other two. It is further noteworthy that this, the effort of a handful of unnamed men, was the true 'leader'—the shoot that grew. Philip's work, and Peter's so far as we know, were side branches, which came to little; this led on to a church at Antioch, and so to Paul's missionary work, and all that came of that.

The incident naturally suggests some thoughts bearing on the general subject of Christian work, which we now briefly present.

I. Notice the spontaneous impulse which these men obeyed.

Persecution drove the members of the Church apart, and, as a matter of course, wherever they went they took their faith with them, and, as a matter of course, spoke about it. The coals were scattered from the hearth in Jerusalem by the armed heel of violence. That did not put the fire out, but only spread it, for wherever they were flung they kindled a blaze. These men had no special injunction 'to preach the Lord Jesus.' They do not seem to have adopted this line of action deliberately, or of set purpose. 'They believed, and therefore spoke.' A spontaneous impulse, and nothing more, leads them on. They find themselves rejoicing in a great Saviour-Friend. They see all around them men who need Him, and that is enough. They obey the promptings of the voice within, and lay the foundations of the first Gentile Church.

Such a spontaneous impulse is ever the natural result of our own personal possession of Christ. In regard to worldly good the instinct, except when overcome by higher motives, is to keep the treasure to oneself. But even in the natural sphere there are possessions which to have is to long to impart, such as truth and knowledge. And in the spiritual sphere, it is emphatically the case that real possession is always accompanied by a longing to impart. The old prophet spoke a universal truth when he said: 'Thy word was as a fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.' If we have found Christ for ourselves, we shall undoubtedly wish to speak forth our knowledge of His love. Convictions which are deep demand expression. Emotion which is strong needs utterance. If our hearts have any fervour of love to Christ in them, it will be as natural to tell it forth, as tears are to sorrow or smiles to happiness. True, there is a reticence in profound feeling, and sometimes the deepest love can only 'love and be silent,' and there is a just suspicion of loud or vehement protestations of Christian emotion, as of any emotion. But for all that, it remains true that a heart warmed with the love of Christ needs to express its love, and will give it forth, as certainly as light must radiate from its centre, or heat from a fire.

Then, true kindliness of heart creates the same impulse. We cannot truly possess the treasure for ourselves without pity for those who have it not. Surely there is no stranger contradiction than that Christian men and women can be content to keep Christ as if He were their special property, and have their spirits untouched into any likeness of His divine pity for the multitudes who were as 'sheep having no shepherd.' What kind of Christians must they be who think of Christ as 'a Saviour for me,' and take no care to set Him forth as 'a Saviour for you'? What should we think of men in a shipwreck who were content to get into the lifeboat, and let everybody else drown? What should we think of people in a famine feasting sumptuously on their private stores, whilst women were boiling their children for a meal and men fighting with dogs for garbage on the dunghills? 'He that withholdeth bread, the people shall curse him.' What of him who withholds the Bread of Life, and all the while claims to be a follower of the Christ, who gave His flesh for the life of the world?

Further, loyalty to Christ creates the same impulse. If we are true to our Lord, we shall feel that we cannot but speak up and out for Him, and that all the more where His name is unloved and unhonoured. He has left His good fame very much in our hands, and the very same impulse which hurries words to our lips when we hear the name of an absent friend calumniated should make us speak for Him. He is a doubtfully loyal subject who, if he lives among rebels, is afraid to show his colours. He is already a coward, and is on the way to be a traitor. Our Master has made us His witnesses. He has placed in our hands, as a sacred deposit, the honour of His name. He has entrusted to us, as His selectest sign of confidence, the carrying out of the purposes for which on earth His blood was shed, on which in heaven His heart is set. How can we be loyal to Him if we are not forced by a mighty constraint to respond to His great tokens of trust in us, and if we know nothing of that spirit which said: 'Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!' I do not say that a man cannot be a Christian unless he knows and obeys this impulse. But, at least, we may safely say that he is a very weak and imperfect Christian who does not.

II. This incident suggests the universal obligation on all Christians to make known Christ.

These men were not officials. In these early days the Church had a very loose organisation. But the fugitives in our narrative seem to have had among them none even of the humble office-bearers of primitive times. Neither had they any command or commission from Jerusalem. No one there had given them authority, or, as would appear, knew anything of their proceedings. Could there be a more striking illustration of the great truth that whatever varieties of function may be committed to various officers in the Church, the work of telling Christ's love to men belongs to every one who has found it for himself or herself? 'This honour have all the saints.'

Whatever may be our differences of opinion as to Church order and offices, they need not interfere with our firm grasp of this truth. 'Preaching Christ,' in the sense in which that expression is used in the New Testament, implies no one special method of proclaiming the glad tidings. A word written in a letter to a friend, a sentence dropped in casual conversation, a lesson to a child on a mother's lap, or any other way by which, to any listeners, the great story of the Cross is told, is as truly—often more truly—preaching Christ as the set discourse which has usurped the name.

We profess to believe in the priesthood of all believers, we are ready enough to assert it in opposition to sacerdotal assumptions. Are we as ready to recognise it as laying a very real responsibility upon us, and involving a very practical inference as to our own conduct? We all have the power, therefore we all have the duty. For what purpose did God give us the blessing of knowing Christ ourselves? Not for our own well-being alone, but that through us the blessing might be still further diffused.

> 'Heaven doth with us as men with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves.'

'God hath shined into our hearts' that we might give to others 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Every Christian is solemnly bound to fulfil this divine intention, and to take heed to the imperative command, 'Freely ye have received, freely give.'

III. Observe, further, the simple message which they proclaimed.

'Preaching the Lord Jesus,' says the text—or more accurately perhaps—'preaching Jesus as Lord.' The substance, then, of their message was just this—proclamation of the person and dignity of their Master, the story of the human life of the Man, the story of the divine sacrifice and self-bestowment by which He had bought the right of supreme rule over every heart; and the urging of His claims on all who heard of His love. And this, their message, was but the proclamation of their own personal experience. They had found Jesus to be for themselves Lover and Lord, Friend and Saviour of their souls, and the joy they had received they sought to share with these Greeks, worshippers of gods and lords many.

Surely anybody can deliver that message who has had that experience. All have not the gifts which would fit for public speech, but all who have 'tasted that the Lord is gracious' can somehow tell how gracious He is. The first Christian sermon was very short, and it was very efficacious, for it 'brought to Jesus' the whole congregation. Here it is: 'He first findeth his brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias.' Surely we can all say that, if we have found Him. Surely we shall all long to say it, if we are glad that we have found Him, and if we love our brother.

Notice, too, how simple the form as well as the substance of the message. 'They *spake*.' It was no set address, no formal utterance, but familiar, natural talk to ones and twos, as opportunity offered. The form was so simple that we may say that there was none. What we want is that Christian people should speak anyhow. What does the shape of the cup matter? What does it matter whether it be gold or clay? The main thing is that it shall bear the water of life to some thirsty lip. All Christians have to preach, as the word is used here, that is, to tell the good news. Their task is to carry a message—no refinement of words is needed for that—arguments are not needed. They have to tell it simply and faithfully, as one who only cares to repeat what he has had given to him. They have to tell it confidently, as having proved it true. They have to tell it beseechingly, as loving the souls to whom they bring it. Surely we can all do that, if we ourselves are living on Christ and have drunk into His Spirit. Let His mighty salvation, experienced by yourselves, be the substance of your message, and let the form of it be guided by the old words, 'It shall be, when the Spirit of the Lord is come upon thee, that thou shalt do as occasion shall serve thee.'

IV. Notice, lastly, the mighty Helper who prospered their work.

'The hand of the Lord was with them.' The very keynote of this Book of the Acts is the work of the ascended Christ in and for His Church. At every turning-point in the history, and throughout the whole narratives, forms of speech like this occur, bearing witness to the profound conviction of the writer that Christ's active energy was with His servants, and Christ's Hand the origin of all their security and of all their success.

So this is a statement of a permanent and universal fact. We do not labour alone; however feeble our hands, that mighty Hand is laid on them to direct their movements and to lend strength to their weakness. It is not our speech which will secure results, but His presence with our words which will bring it about that even through them a great number shall believe and turn to the Lord. There is our encouragement when we are despondent. There is our rebuke when we are self-confident. There is our stimulus when we are indolent. There is our quietness when we are impatient. If ever we are tempted to think our task heavy, let us not forget that He who set it helps us to do it, and from His throne shares in all our toils, the Lord still, as of old, working with us. If ever we feel that our strength is nothing, and that we stand solitary against many foes, let us fall back upon the peace-giving thought that one man against the world, with

Christ to help him, is always in the majority, and let us leave issues of our work in His hands, whose hand will guard the seed sown in weakness, whose smile will bless the springing thereof.

How little any of us know what will become of our poor work, under His fostering care! How little these men knew that they were laying the foundations of the great change which was to transform the Christian community from a Jewish sect into a world-embracing Church! So is it ever. We know not what we do when simply and humbly we speak His name. The far-reaching results escape our eyes. Then, sow the seed, and He will 'give it a body as it pleaseth Him.' On earth we may never know the fruits of our labours. They will be among the surprises of heaven, where many a solitary worker shall exclaim with wonder, as he looks on the hitherto unknown children whom God hath given him, 'Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been?' Then, though our names may have perished from earthly memories, like those of the simple fugitives of Cyprus and Cyrene, who 'were the first that ever burst' into the night of heathendom with the torch of the Gospel in their hands, they will be written in the Lamb's book of life, and He will confess them in the presence of His Father in heaven.

THE EXHORTATION OF BARNABAS[1]

'Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.'—ACTS xi. 23.

THE first purely heathen converts had been brought into the Church by the nameless men of Cyprus and Cyrene, private persons with no office or commission to preach, who, in simple obedience to the instincts of a Christian heart, leaped the barrier which seemed impassable to the Church in Jerusalem, and solved the problem over which Apostles were hesitating. Barnabas is sent down to see into this surprising new phenomenon, and his mission, though probably not hostile, was, at all events, one of inquiry and doubt. But like a true man, he yielded to facts, and widened his theory to suit them. He saw the tokens of Christian life in these Gentile converts, and that compelled him to admit that the Church was wider than some of his friends in Jerusalem thought. A pregnant lesson for modern theorists who, on one ground or another of doctrine or of orders, narrow the great conception of Christ's Church! Can you see 'the grace of God' in the people? Then they are in the Church, whatever becomes of your theories, and the sooner you let them out so as to fit the facts, the better for you and for them.

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[1] Preached before the Congregational Union of England and Wales.

Satisfied as to their true Christian character, Barnabas sets himself to help them to grow. Now, remember how recently they had been converted; how, from their Gentile origin, they can have had next to no systematic instruction; how the taint of heathen morals, such as were common in that luxurious, corrupt Antioch, must have clung to them; how unformed must have been their loose Church organisation—and remembering all this, think of this one exhortation as summing up all that Barnabas had to say to them. He does not say, Do this, or Believe that, or Organise the other; but he says, Stick to Jesus Christ the Lord. On this commandment hangs all the law; it is the one all-inclusive summary of the duties of the Christian life.

So, brethren and fathers, I venture to take these words now, as containing large lessons for us all, appropriate at all times, and especially in a sermon on such an occasion as the present.

We may deal with the thoughts suggested by these words very simply, just looking at the points as they lie—what Barnabas *saw*, what he *felt*, what he *said*.

I. What Barnabas saw.

The grace of God here has very probably the specific meaning of the miracle-working gift of the Holy Spirit. That is rendered probable by the analogy of other instances recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, such as Peter's experience at Cæsarea, where all his hesitations and reluctance were swept away when 'the Holy Ghost fell on them as on us at the beginning, and they spake with tongues.' If so, what convinced Barnabas that these uncircumcised Gentiles were Christians like himself, may have been their similar possession of the visible and audible effects of that gift of God. But the language does not compel this interpretation; and the absence of all distinct reference to these extraordinary powers as existing there, among the new converts at Antioch, may be intended to mark a difference in the nature of the evidence. At any rate, the possibly intentional generality of the expression is significant and fairly points to an extension of the spiritual gifts much beyond the limits of miraculous powers. There are other ways by which the grace of God may be seen and heard, thank God! than by speaking with tongues and working miracles; and the first lesson of our text is that wherever that grace is made visible by its appropriate manifestations, there we are to recognise a brother.

Augustine said, 'Where Christ is there is the Church, and that is true, but vague; for the question still remains, 'And where *is* Christ?' The only satisfying answer is, Christ is wherever Christlike men manifest a life drawn from, and kindred with, His life. And so the true form of the dictum for practical purposes comes to be: 'Where the grace of Christ is visible, there is the Church.'

That great truth is sinned against and denied in many ways. Most chiefly, perhaps, by the successors in modern garb of the more Jewish portion of that Church at Jerusalem who sent Barnabas to Antioch. They had no objection to Gentiles entering the Church, but they must come in by the way of circumcision; they quite believed that it was Christ who saved, and His grace which sanctified, but they thought that His grace would only flow in a given channel; and so do their modern representatives, who exalt sacraments, and consequently priests, to the same place as the Judaizers in the early Church did the rite of the old Covenant. Such teachers have much to say about the notes of the Church, and have elaborated a complicated system of identification by which you may know the genuine article, and unmask impostors. The attempt is about as wise as to try to weave a network fine enough to keep back a stream. The water will flow through the closest meshes, and when Christ pours out the Spirit, He is apt to do it in utter disregard of notes of the Church, and of channels of sacramental grace.

We Congregationalists, who have no orders, no sacraments, no Apostolic succession; who in order not to break loose from Christ and conscience have had to break loose from 'Catholic tradition,' and have been driven to separation by the true schismatics, who have insisted on another bond of Church unity than union to Christ, are denied nowadays a place in His Church.

The true answer to all that arrogant assumption and narrow pedantry which confine the free flow of the water of life to the conduits of sacraments and orders, and will only allow the wind that bloweth where it listeth to make music in the pipes of their organs, is simply the homely one which shivered a corresponding theory to atoms in the fair open mind of Barnabas.

The Spirit of Christ at work in men's hearts, making them pure and gentle, simple and unworldly, refining their characters, elevating their aims, toning their whole being into accord with the music of His life, is the true proof that men are Christians, and that communities of such men are Churches of His. Mysterious efficacy is claimed for Christian ordinances. Well, the question is a fair one: Is the type of Christian character produced within these sacred limits, which we are hopelessly outside, conspicuously higher and more manifestly Christlike than that nourished by no sacraments, and grown not under glass, but in the unsheltered open? Has not God set His seal on these communities to which we belong? With many faults for which we have to be, and are, humble before Him, we can point to the lineaments of the family likeness, and say, 'Are they Hebrews? so are we. Are they Israelites? so are we. Are they the seed of Abraham? so are we.'

Once get that truth wrought into men's minds, that the true test of Christianity is the visible presence of a grace in character which is evidently God's, and whole mountains of prejudice and error melt away. We are just as much in danger of narrowing the Church in accordance with our narrowness as any 'sacramentarian' of them all. We are tempted to think that no good thing can grow up under the baleful shadow of that tree, a sacerdotal Christianity. We are tempted to think that all the good people are Dissenters, just as Churchmen are to think that nobody can be a Christian who prays without a prayer-book. Our own type of denominational character—and there is such a thing—comes to be accepted by us as the all but exclusive ideal of a devout man; and we have not imagination enough to conceive, nor charity enough to believe in, the goodness which does not speak our dialect, nor see with our eyes. Dogmatical narrowness has built as high walls as ceremonial Christianity has reared round the fold of Christ. And the one deliverance for us all from the transformed selfishness, which has so much to do with shaping all these wretched narrow theories of the Church, is to do as this man did—open our eyes with sympathetic eagerness to see God's grace in many an unexpected place, and square our theories with His dealings.

It used to be an axiom that there was no life in the sea beyond a certain limit of a few hundred feet. It was learnedly and conclusively demonstrated that pressure and absence of light, and I know not what beside, made life at greater depths impossible. It was proved that in such conditions creatures could not live. And then, when that was settled, the *Challenger* put down her dredge five miles, and brought up healthy and good-sized living things, with eyes in their heads, from that enormous depth. So, then, the savant had to ask, *How* can there be life? instead of asserting that there cannot be; and, no doubt, the answer will be forthcoming some day.

We have all been too much accustomed to set arbitrary limits to the diffusion of the life of Christ among men. Let us rather rejoice when we see forms of beauty, which bear the mark of His hand, drawn from depths that we deemed waste, and thankfully confess that the bounds of our expectation, and the framework of our institutions, do not confine the breadth of His working, nor the sweep of His grace.

II. What Barnabas felt.

'He was glad.' It was a triumph of Christian principle to recognise the grace of God under new forms, and in so strange a place. It was a still greater triumph to hail it with rejoicing. One need not have wondered if the acknowledgment of a fact, dead in the teeth of all his prejudices, and seemingly destructive of some profound convictions, had been somewhat grudging. Even a good, true man might have been bewildered and reluctant to let go so much as was destroyed by the admission—'Then hath God granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life,'—and might have been pardoned if he had not been able to do more than acquiesce and hold his peace. We are scarcely just to these early Jewish Christians when we wonder at their hesitation on this matter, and are apt to forget the enormous strength of the prejudices and sacred conviction which they had to overcome. Hence the context seems to consider that the quick recognition of Christian character on the part of Barnabas, and his gladness at the discovery, need explanation, and so it adds, with special reference to these, as it would seem, 'for he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,' as if nothing short of such characteristics could have sufficiently emancipated him from the narrowness that would have refused to discern the good, or the bitterness that would have been offended at it.

So, dear brethren, we may well test ourselves with this question: Does the discovery of the working of the grace of God outside the limits of our own Churches and communions excite a quick, spontaneous emotion of gladness in *our* hearts? It may upset some of our theories; it may teach us that things which we thought very important, 'distinctive principles' and the like, are not altogether as precious as we thought them; it may require us to give up some pleasant ideas of our superiority, and of the necessary conformity of all good people to our type. Are we willing to let them all go, and without a twinge of envy or a hanging back from prejudice, to welcome the discovery that 'God fulfils Himself in many ways'? Have we schooled ourselves to say honestly, 'Therein I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice'?

There is much to overcome if we would know this Christlike gladness. The good and the bad in us may both oppose it. The natural deeper interest in the well-being of the Churches of our own faith and order, the legitimate ties which unite us with these, our conscientious convictions, our friendships, the *esprit de corps* born of fighting shoulder to shoulder, will, of course, make our sympathies flow most quickly and deeply in denominational channels. And then come in abundance of less worthy motives, some altogether bad and some the exaggeration of what is good, and we get swallowed up in our own individual work, or in that of our 'denomination,' and have but a very tepid joy in anybody else's prosperity.

In almost every town of England, your Churches, and those to which I belong, with Presbyterians and

Wesleyans, stand side by side. The conditions of our work make some rivalry inevitable, and none of us, I suppose, object to that. It helps to keep us all diligent: a sturdy adherence to our several 'distinctive principles,' and an occasional hard blow in fair fight on their behalf we shall all insist upon. Our brotherhood is all the more real for frank speech, and 'the animated No!' is an essential in all intercourse which is not stagnant or mawkish. There is much true fellowship and much good feeling among all these. But we want far more of an honest rejoicing in each other's success, a quicker and truer manly sympathy with each other's work, a fuller consciousness of our solidarity in Christ, and a clearer exhibition of it before the world.

And on a wider view, as our eyes travel over the wide field of Christendom, and our memories go back over the long ages of the story of the Church, let gladness, and not wonder or reluctance, be the temper with which we see the graces of Christian character lifting their meek blossoms in corners strange to us, and breathing their fragrance over the pastures of the wilderness. In many a cloister, in many a hermit's cell, from amidst the smoke of incense, through the dust of controversies, we should see, and be glad to see, faces bright with the radiance caught from Christ. Let us set a jealous watch over our hearts that self-absorption, or denominationalism, or envy do not make the sight a pain instead of a joy; and let us remember that the eye-salve which will purge our dim sight to behold the grace of God in all its forms is that grace itself, which ever recognises its own kindred, and lives in the gladness of charity, and the joy of beholding a brother's good. If we are to have eyes to know the grace of God when we see it, and a heart to rejoice when we know it, we must get them as Barnabas got his, and be good men, because we are full of the Holy Ghost, and full of the Holy Ghost because we are full of faith.

III. What Barnabas said.

'He exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.' The first thing that strikes one about this all-sufficient directory for Christian life is the emphasis with which it sets forth 'the Lord' as the one object to be grasped and held. The sum of all objective Religion is Christ—the sum of all subjective Religion is cleaving to Him. A living Person to be laid hold of, and a personal relation to that Person, such is the conception of Religion, whether considered as revelation or as inward life, which underlies this exhortation. Whether we listen to His own words about Himself, and mark the altogether unprecedented way in which He was His own theme, and the unique decisiveness and plainness with which He puts His own personality before us as the Incarnate Truth, the pattern for all human conduct, the refuge and the rest for the world of weary ones; or whether we give ear to the teaching of His Apostles; from whatever point of view we approach Christianity, it all resolves itself into the person of Jesus Christ. He is the *Revelation* of God; theology, properly so called, is but the formulating of the facts which He gives us; and for the modern world the alternative is, Christ the manifested God, or no God at all, other than the shadow of a name. He is the perfect *Exemplar* of humanity! The law of life and the power to fulfil the law are both in Him; and the superiority of Christian morality consists not in this or that isolated precept, but in the embodiment of all goodness in His life, and in the new motive which He supplies for keeping the commandment. Wrenched away from Him, Christian morality has no being. He is the sacrifice for the world, the salvation of which flows from what He does, and not merely from what He taught or was. His personality is the foundation of His work, and the gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation is all contained in the name of Jesus.

There is a constant tendency to separate the results of Christ's life and death, whether considered as revelation, atonement, or ethics, from Him, and unconsciously to make these the sum of our Religion, and the object of our faith. Especially is this the case in times of restless thought and eager canvassing of the very foundations of religious belief, like the present. Therefore it is wholesome for us all to be brought back to the pregnant simplicity of the thought which underlies this text, and to mark how vividly these early Christians apprehended a living Lord as the sum and substance of all which they had to grasp.

There is a whole world between the man to whom God's revelation consists in certain doctrines given to us by Jesus Christ, and the man to whom it consists in that Christ Himself. Grasping a living person is not the same as accepting a proposition. True, the propositions are about Him, and we do not know Him without them. But equally true, we need to be reminded that *He* is our Saviour and not *they*, and that God has revealed Himself to us not in words and sentences but in a life.

For, alas! the doctrinal element has overborne the personal among all Churches and all schools of thought, and in the necessary process of formulating and systematising the riches which are in Jesus, we are all apt to confound the creeds with the Christ, and so to manipulate Christianity until, instead of being the revelation of a Person and a gospel, it has become a system of divinity. Simple, devout souls have to complain that they cannot find even a dead Christ, to say nothing of a living one, for the theologians have 'taken away their Lord, and they know not where they have laid Him.'

It is, therefore, to be reckoned as a distinct gain that one result of the course of more recent thought, both among friends and foes, has been to make all men feel more than before, that all revelation is contained in the living person of Jesus Christ. So did the Church believe before creeds were. So it is coming to feel again, with a consciousness enriched and defined by the whole body of doctrine, which has flowed from Him during all the ages. That solemn, gracious Figure rises day by day more clearly before men, whether they love Him or no, as the vital centre of this great whole of doctrines, laws, institutions, which we call Christianity. Round the story of His life the final struggle is to be waged. The foe feels that, so long as that remains, all other victories count for nothing. We feel that if that goes, there is nothing to keep. The principles and the precepts will perish alike, as the fair palace of the old legend, that crumbled to dust when its builder died. But so long as He stands before mankind as He is painted in the Gospel, it will endure. If all else were annihilated, Churches, creeds and all, leave us these four Gospels, and all else would be evolved again. The world knows now, and the Church has always known, though it has not always been true to the significance of the fact, that Jesus Christ is Christianity, and that because He lives, it will live also.

And consequently the sum of all personal religion is this simple act described here as *cleaving to Him.*

Need I do more than refer to the rich variety of symbols and forms of expression under which that thought is put alike by the Master and by His servants? Deepest of all are His own great words, of which our text is but a feeble echo, 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' Fairest of all is that lovely emblem of the vine, setting forth the sweet mystery of our union with Him. Far as it is from the outmost pliant tendril to the root, one life passes to the very extremities, and every cluster swells and reddens and mellows because of its mysterious flow. 'So also is Christ.' We remember how often the invitation flowed from His lips, *Come* unto Me; how He was wont to beckon men away from self and the world with the great command, *Follow* Me; how He explained the secret of all true life to consist in *eating* Him. We may recall, too, the emphasis and perpetual reiteration with which Paul speaks of being 'in Jesus' as the condition of all blessedness, power, and righteousness; and the emblems which he so often employs of the building bound into a whole on the foundation from which it derives its stability, of the body compacted and organised into a whole by the head from which it derives its life.

We begin to be Christians, as this context tells us, when we 'turn to the Lord.' We continue to be Christians, as Barnabas reminded these ignorant beginners, by 'cleaving to the Lord.' Seeing, then, that our great task is to preserve that which we have as the very foundation of our Christian life, clearly the truest method of so keeping it will be the constant repetition of the act by which we got it at first. In other words, faith joined us to Christ, and continuously reiterated acts of faith keep us united to Him. So, if I may venture, fathers and brethren, to cast my words into the form of exhortation, even to such an audience as the present, I would earnestly say, Let us cleave to Christ by continual renewal of our first faith in Him.

The longest line may be conceived of as produced simply by the motion of its initial point. So should our lives be, our progress not consisting in leaving our early acts of faith behind us, but in repeating them over and over again till the points coalesce in one unbroken line which goes straight to the Throne and Heart of Jesus. True, the repetition should be accompanied with fuller knowledge, with calmer certitude, and should come from a heart ennobled and encircled by a Christ-possessing past. As in some great symphony the theme which was given out in low notes on one poor instrument recurs over and over again, embroidered with varying harmonies, and unfolding a richer music, till it swells into all the grandeur of the triumphant close, so our lives should be bound into a unity, and in their unity bound to Christ by the constant renewal of our early faith, and the fathers should come round again to the place which they occupied when as children they first knew Him that is 'from the beginning' to the end one and the same.

Such constant reiteration is needed, too, because yesterday's trust has no more power to secure to-day's union than the shreds of cloth and nails which hold last year's growth to the wall will fasten this year's shoots. Each moment must be united to Christ by its own act of faith, or it will be separated from Him. So living in the Lord we shall be strong and wise, happy and holy. So dying in the Lord we shall be of the dead who are blessed. So sleeping in Jesus we shall at the last be found in Him at that day, and shall be raised up together, and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

But more specially let us cleave to Christ by habitual contemplation. There can be no real continuous closeness of intercourse with Him, except by thought ever recurring to Him amidst all the tumult of our busy days. I do not mean professional thinking or controversial thinking, of which we ministers have more than enough. There is another mood of mind in which to approach our Lord than these, a mood sadly unfamiliar, I am afraid, in these days: when poor Mary has hardly a chance of a reputation for 'usefulness' by the side of busy, bustling Martha—that still contemplation of the truth which we possess, not with the view of discovering its foundations, or investigating its applications, or even of increasing our knowledge of its contents, but of bringing our own souls more completely under its influence, and saturating our being with its fragrance. The Church has forgotten how to meditate. We are all so occupied arguing and deducing and elaborating, that we have no time for retired, still contemplation, and therefore lose the finest aroma of the truth we profess to believe. Many of us are so busy thinking about Christianity that we have lost our hold of Christ. Sure I am that there are few things more needed by our modern religion than the old exhortation, 'Come, My people, enter into thy chambers and shut thy doors about thee.' Cleave to the Lord by habitual play of meditative thought on the treasures hidden in His name, and waiting like gold in the quartz, to be the prize of our patient sifting and close gaze.

And when the great truths embodied in Him stand clear before us, then let us remember that we have not done with them when we have *seen* them. Next must come into exercise the moral side of faith, the voluntary act of trust, the casting ourselves on Him whom we behold, the making our own of the blessings which He holds out to us. Flee to Christ as to our strong habitation to which we may continually resort. Hold tightly by Christ with a grasp which nothing can slacken (that whitens your very knuckles as you clutch Him), lean on Christ all your weight and all your burdens. Cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart.

Let us cleave to the Lord by constant outgoings of our love to Him. That is the bond which unites human spirits together in the only real union, and Scripture teaches us to see in the sweetest, sacredest, closest tie that men and women can know, a real, though faint, shadow of the far deeper and truer union between Christ and us. The same love which is the bond of perfectness between man and man, is the bond between us and Christ. In no dreamy, semi-pantheistic fusion of the believer with his Lord do we find the true conception of the unity of Christ and His Church, but in a union which preserves the individualities lest it should slay the love. Faith knits us to Christ, and faith is the mother of love, which maintains the blessed union. So let us not be ashamed of the *emotional* side of our religion, nor deem that we can cleave to Christ unless our hearts twine their tendrils round Him, and our love pours its odorous treasures on His sacred feet, not without weeping and embraces. Cold natures may carp, but Love is justified of her children, and Christ accepts the homage that has a heart in it. Cleaving to the Lord is not merely love, but it is impossible without it. The order is Faith, Love, Obedience—that threefold cord knits men to

Christ, and Christ to men. For the understanding, a continuous grasp of Him as the object of thought. For the heart, a continuous outgoing to Him as the object of our love. For the will, a continuous submission to Him as the Lord of our obedience. For the whole nature, a continuous cleaving to Him as the object of our faith and worship.

Such is the true discipline of the Christian life. Such is the all-sufficient command; as for the newest convert from heathenism, with little knowledge and the taint of his old vices in his soul, so for the saint fullest of wisdom and nearest the Light.

It *is* all-sufficient. If Barnabas had been like some of us, he would have had a very different style of exhortation. He would have said, 'This irregular work has been well done, but there are no authorised teachers here, and no provision has been made for the due administration of the sacraments of the Church. The very first thing of all is to give these people the blessing of bishops and priests.' Some of us would have said, 'Valuable work has been done, but these good people are terribly ignorant. The best thing would be to get ready as soon as possible some manual of Christian doctrine, and in the meantime provide for their systematic instruction in at least the elements of the faith.' Some of us would have said, 'No doubt they have been converted, but we fear there has been too much of the emotional in the preaching. The moral side of Christianity has not been pressed home, and what they chiefly need is to be taught that it is not feeling, but righteousness. Plain, practical instruction in Christian duty is the one thing they want.'

Barnabas knew better. He did not despise organisation, nor orthodoxy, nor practical righteousness, but he knew that all three, and everything else that any man needed for his perfecting would come, if only the converts kept near to Christ, and that nothing else was of any use if they did not. That same conviction should for us settle the relative importance which we attach to these subordinate and derivative things, and to the primary and primitive duty. Obedience to it will secure them. They, without it, are not worth securing.

We spend much pains and effort nowadays in perfecting our organisations and consolidating our resources, and I have not a word to say against that. But heavier machinery needs more power in the engine, and that means greater capacity in your boilers and more fire in your furnace. The more complete our organisation, the more do we need a firm hold of Christ, or we shall be overweighted by it, shall be in danger of burning incense to our own net, shall be tempted to trust in drill rather than in courage, in mechanism rather than in the life drawn from Christ. On the other hand, if we put as our first care the preservation of the closeness of our union with Christ, that life will shape a body for itself, and 'to every seed its own body.'

True conceptions of Him, and a definite theology, are good and needful. Let us cleave to Him with mind and heart, and we shall receive all the knowledge we need, and be guided into the deep things of God. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and the basis of all theology is the personal possession of Him who is 'the wisdom of God' and 'the Light of the world.' Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. *Pectus facit Theologum.*

Plain, straightforward morality and everyday righteousness are better than all emotion and all dogmatism and all churchism, says the world, and Christianity says much the same; but plain, straightforward righteousness and everyday morality come most surely when a man is keeping close to Christ. In a word, everything that can adorn the character with beauty, and clothe the Church with glorious apparel, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, all that the world or God calls virtue and crowns with praise, they are all in their fulness in Him, and all are most surely derived from Him by keeping fast hold of His hand, and preserving the channels clear through which His manifold grace may flow into our souls. The same life is strength in the arm, pliancy in the fingers, swiftness in the foot, light in the eye, music on the lips; so the same grace is Protean in its forms, and to His servants who trust Him Christ ever says, 'What would ye that I should do unto you? Be it even as thou wilt.' The same mysterious power lives in the swaying branch, and in the veined leaf, and in the blushing clusters. With like wondrous transformations of the one grace, the Lord pours Himself into our spirits, filling all needs and fitting for all circumstances. Therefore for us all, individuals and Churches, this remains the prime command, 'With purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord.' Dear brethren in the ministry, how sorely we need this exhortation! Our very professional occupation with Christ and His truth is full of danger for us; we are so accustomed to handle these sacred themes as a means of instructing or impressing others that we get to regard them as our weapons, even if we do not degrade them still further by thinking of them as our stock-in-trade and means of oratorical effect. We must keep very firm hold of Christ for ourselves by much solitary communion, and so retranslating into the nutriment of our own souls the message we bring to men, else when we have preached to others we ourselves may be cast away. All the ordinary tendencies which draw men from Him work on us, and a host of others peculiar to ourselves, and all around us run strong currents of thought which threaten to sweep many away. Let us tighten our grasp of Him in the face of modern doubt; and take heed to ourselves that neither vanity, nor worldliness, nor sloth; neither the gravitation earthward common to all, nor the temptations proper to *our* office; neither unbelieving voices without nor voices within, seduce us from His side. There only is our peace, there our wisdom, there our power.

Subtly and silently the separating forces are ever at work upon us, and all unconsciously to ourselves our hold may relax, and the flow of this grace into our spirits may cease, while yet we mechanically keep up the round of outward service, nor even suspect that our strength is departed from us. Many a stately elm that seems full of vigorous life, for all its spreading boughs and clouds of dancing leaves, is hollow at the heart, and when the storm comes goes down with a crash, and men wonder, as they look at the ruin, how such a mere shell of life with a core of corruption could stand so long. It rotted within, and fell at last, because its roots did not go deep down to the rich soil, where they would have found nourishment, but ran along near the surface among gravel and stones. If we would stand firm, be sound within, and bring forth much fruit, we must strike our roots deep in Him who is the anchorage of our souls, and the nourisher of all our being.

Hearken, beloved brethren, in this great work of the ministry, not to the exhortation of the servant, but to the solemn command of the Master, 'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.' And let us, knowing our own weakness, take heed of the self-confidence that answers, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I,' and turn the vows which spring to our lips into the lowly prayer, 'My soul cleaveth unto the dust, quicken Thou me according to Thy word.' Then, thinking rather of His cleaving to us than of our cleaving to Him, let us resolutely take as the motto of our lives the grand words: 'I follow after, if that I may lay hold of that for which I am also laid hold of by Christ Jesus!'

WHAT A GOOD MAN IS, AND HOW HE BECOMES SO

'He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'—ACTS xi. 24.

'A GOOD man.' How easily that title is often gained! There is, perhaps, no clearer proof that men are bad than the sort of people whom they consent to call good.

It is a common observation that all words describing moral excellence tend to deteriorate and to contract their meaning, just as bright metal rusts by exposure, or coins become light and illegible by use. So it comes to pass that any decently respectable man, especially if he has an easy temper and a dash of frankness and good humour, is christened with this title 'good.' The Bible, which is the verdict of the Judge, is a great deal more chary in its use of the word. You remember how Jesus Christ once rebuked a man for addressing

Him so, not that He repudiated the title, but that the giver had bestowed it lightly and out of mere conventional politeness. The word is too noble to be applied without very good reason.

But here we have a picture of Barnabas hung in the gallery of Scripture portraits, and this is the description of it in the catalogue, 'He was a good man.'

You observe that my text is in the nature of an analysis. It begins at the outside, and works inwards. 'He was a good man.' Indeed;—how came he to be so? He was 'full of the Holy Ghost.' Full of the Holy Ghost, was he? How came he to be that? He was 'full of faith.' So the writer digs down, as it were, till he gets to the bed-rock, on which all the higher strata repose; and here is his account of the way in which it is possible for human nature to win this resplendent title, and to be adjudged of God as 'good,' 'full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'

So these three steps in the exposition of the character and its secret will afford a framework for what I have to say now.

I. Note, then, first, the sort of man whom the Judge will call 'good.'

Now, I suppose I need not spend much time in massing together, in brief outline, the characteristics of Barnabas. He was a Levite, belonging to the sacerdotal tribe, and perhaps having some slight connection with the functions of the Temple ministry. He was not a resident in the Holy Land, but a Hellenistic Jew, a native of Cyprus, who had come into contact with heathenism in a way that had beaten many a prejudice out of him. We first hear of him as taking a share in the self-sacrificing burst of brotherly love, which, whether it was wise or not, was noble. 'He, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet.' And, as would appear from a reference in one of Paul's letters, he had to support himself afterwards by manual labour.

Then the next thing that we hear of him is that, when the young man who had been a persecuting Pharisee, and the rising hope of the anti-Christian party, all at once came forward with some story of a vision which he had seen on the road to Damascus, and when the older Christians were suspicious of a trick to worm himself into their secrets by a pretended conversion, Barnabas, with the generosity of an unsuspicious nature, which often sees deeper into men than do suspicious eyes, was the first to cast the ægis of his recognition round him. In like manner, when Christianity took an entirely spontaneous and, to the Church at Jerusalem, rather unwelcome new development and expansion, when some unofficial believers, without any authority from headquarters, took upon themselves to stride clean across the wall of separation, and to speak of Jesus Christ to blank heathens, and found, to the not altogether gratified surprise of the Christians at Jerusalem, 'that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost,' it was Barnabas who was sent down to look into this surprising new phenomenon, and we read that 'when he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad.' The reason why he rejoiced over the manifestation of the grace of God in such a strange form was because 'he was a good man,' and his goodness recognised goodness in others and was glad at the work of the Lord. The new condition of affairs sent him to look for Paul, and to put him to work. Then we find him set apart to missionary service, and the leader of the first missionary band, in which he was accompanied by his friend Saul. He acquiesced frankly, and without a murmur, in the superiority of the junior, and yielded up pre-eminence to him quite willingly. The story of that missionary journey begins 'Barnabas and Saul,' but very soon it comes to be 'Paul and Barnabas,' and it keeps that order throughout. He was an older man than Paul, for when at Lystra the people thought that the gods had come down in the likeness of men; Barnabas was Jupiter, and Paul the quick-footed Mercury, messenger of the gods. He was in the work before Paul was thought of, and it must have taken a great deal of goodness to acquiesce in 'He must increase and I must decrease.' Then came the quarrel between them, the foolish fondness for his runaway nephew John Mark, whom he insisted on retaining in a place for which he was conspicuously unfitted. And so he lost his friend, the confidence of the Church, and his work. He sulked away into Cyprus; he had his nephew, for whom he had given up all these other things. A little fault may wreck a life, and the whiter the character the blacker the smallest stain upon it.

We do not hear anything more of him. Apparently, from one casual allusion, he continued to serve the Lord in evangelistic work, but the sweet communion of the earlier days, and the confident friendship with the Apostle, seem to have come to an end with that sharp contention. So Barnabas drops out of the rank of Christian workers. And yet 'he was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'

Now I have spent more time than I meant over this brief outline of the sort of character here pointed at. Let me just gather into one or two sentences what seem to me to be the lessons of it. The first is this, that the tap-root of all goodness is reference to God and obedience to Him. People tell us that morality is independent of religion. I admit that many men are better than their creeds, and many men are worse than their creeds; but I would also venture to assert that morality is the garment of religion; the body of which religion is the soul; the expression of religion in daily life. And although I am not going to say that nothing which a man does without reference to God has any comparative goodness in it, or that all the acts which are thus void of reference to Him stand upon one level of evil, I do venture to say that the noblest deed, which is not done in conscious obedience to the will of God, lacks its supreme nobleness. The loftiest perfection of conduct is obedience to God. And whatever excellence of self-sacrifice, 'whatsoever things lovely and of good report,' there may be, apart from the presence of this perfect motive, those deeds are imperfect. They do not correspond either to the whole obligations or to the whole possibilities of man, and, therefore, they are beneath the level of the highest good. Good is measured by reference to God.

Then, further, let me remark that one broad feature which characterises the truest goodness is the suppression of self. That is only another way of saying the same thing as I have been saying. It is illustrated for us all through this story of Barnabas. Whosoever can say, 'I think not of myself, but of others; of the cause; of the help I can give to men; and I lay not goods only, nor prejudices only, nor the pride of position and the supremacy of place only at the feet of God, but I lay down my whole self; and I desire that self may be crucified, that God may live in me,'—he, and only he, has reached the height of goodness. Goodness requires the suppression of self.

Further, note that the gentler traits of character are pre-eminent in Christian goodness. There is nothing about this man heroic or exceptional. His virtues are all of the meek and gracious sort—those which we relegate sometimes to an inferior place in our estimates. These things make but a poor show by the side of some of the tawdry splendours of what the vulgar world calls virtues. It requires an educated eye to see the harmony of the sober colouring of some great painter. A child, a clown, a vulgar person—and there are such in all ranks—will prefer flaring reds and blues and yellows heaped together in staring contrast. A thrush or a blackbird is but a soberly clad creature by the side of macaws and paroquets; but the one has a song and the others have only a screech. The gentle virtues are the truly Christian virtues—patience and meekness and long-suffering and sympathy and readiness to efface oneself for the sake of God and of men.

So there is a bit of comfort for us commonplace, humdrum people, to whom God has only given one or two talents, and who can never expect to make a figure before men. We may be little violets below a stone, if we cannot be flaunting hollyhocks and tiger lilies. We may have the beauty of goodness in us after Christ's example, and that is better than to be great.

Barnabas was no genius. He was not even a genius in goodness; he did not strike out anything original and out of the way. He seems to have been a commonplace kind of man enough; but 'he was a good man.

And the weakest and the humblest of us may hope to have the same thing said of us, if we will.

And then, note further, that true goodness, thank God! does not exclude the possibility of falling and sinning. There is a black spot in this man's history; and there are black spots in the histories of all saints. Thank God! the Bible is, as some people would say, almost brutally frank in telling us about the imperfections of the best. Very often imperfections are the exaggerations of characteristic goodnesses, and warn us to take care that we do not push, as Barnabas did, our facility to the point of criminal complicity with weaknesses; and that we do not indulge, instead of strenuously rebuking when need is. Never let our gentleness fall away, like a badly made jelly, into a trembling heap, and never let our strength gather itself together into a repulsive attitude, but guard against the exaggeration of virtue into vice.

Remember that whilst there may be good men who sin, there is One entire and flawless, in whom all types of excellence do meet, and who alone of humanity can front the verdict of the world, and has fronted it now for nineteen centuries, with the question upon His lips, which none have dared to answer, 'Which of you convinceth Me of sin?'

II. Secondly, notice the divine Helper who makes men good.

Luke, if he be the writer of the Acts, goes on with his analysis. He has done with the first fold, the outer garment, as it were; he strips it off and shows us the next fold, 'full of the Holy Ghost.'

A divine Helper, not merely a divine influence, but a divine Person, who not only helps men from without, but so enters into a man as that the man's whole nature is saturated with Him—that is strange language. Mystical and unreal I dare say some of you may think it, but let us consider whether some such divine Helper is not plainly pointed as necessary, by the experience of every man that ever honestly tried to make himself good.

I have no doubt that I am speaking to many persons who, more or less constantly and courageously and earnestly, have laboured at the task of self-improvement and self-culture. I venture to think that, if their standard of what they wish to attain is high, their confession of what they have attained will be very low. Ah, brother! if we think of what it is that we need to make us good—viz. the strengthening of these weak wills of ours, which we cannot strengthen but to a very limited degree by any tonics that we can apply, or any supports with which we may bind them round; if we consider the resistance which ourselves, our passions, our tastes, our habits, our occupations offer, and the resistance which the world around us, friends, companions, and all the aggregate, dread and formidable, of material things present to our becoming, in any lofty and comprehensive sense of the term, good men and women, I think we shall be ready to listen, as to a true Gospel, to the message that says, 'You do not need to do it by yourself.' You have got the wolf by the ears, perhaps, for a moment, but there is tremendous strength in the brute, and your hands and wrists will ache in holding him presently, and what will happen then? You do not need to try it yourself. There is a divine Helper standing at your sides and waiting to strengthen you, and that Helper does not work from outside; He will pass within, and dwell in your hearts and mould and strengthen your wills to what is good, and suppress your inclinations to evil, and, by His inward presence, teach 'your hands to war and your fingers to fight.'

Surely, surely, the experience of the world from the beginning, confirmed by the consciousness and conscience of every one of us, tells us that of ourselves we are impotent, and that the good that is within the reach of our unaided efforts is poor and fragmentary and superficial indeed.

The great promise of the Gospel is precisely this promise. We terribly limit and misunderstand what we call the Gospel if we give such exclusive predominance to one part of it, as some of us are accustomed to do. Thank God! the first word that Jesus Christ says to any soul is, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee.' But that first word has a second that follows it, 'Arise! and walk!' and it is for the sake of the second that the first is spoken. The gift of pardon, the consciousness of acceptance, the fact of reconciliation with God, the closing of the doors of the place of retribution, the quieting of the stings of accusing conscience, all these are but meant to be introductory to that which Jesus Christ Himself, in the Gospel of John, emphatically calls more than once '*the* gift of God,' which He symbolised by 'living water,' which whosoever drank should never thirst, and which whosoever possessed would give it forth in living streams of holy life and noble deeds. The promise of the Gospel is the promise of new life, derived from Christ and maintained in us by the indwelling Spirit, which will come like fresh reinforcements to an all but beaten army in some hard-fought field, which will stand like a stay behind a man, to us almost blown over by the gusts of temptation, which will strengthen what is weak, raise what is low, illumine what is dark, and will make us who are evil good with a goodness given by God through His Son.

Surely there is nothing more congruous with that divine character than that He who Himself is good, and good from Himself, should rejoice in making us, His poor children, into His own likeness. Surely He would not be good unless He delighted to make us good. Surely it is something very like presumption in men to assert that the direct communication of the Spirit of God with the spirits whom God has made is an impossibility. Surely it is flying in the face of Scripture teaching to deny that such communication is a promise. Surely it is a flagrant contradiction of the depths of Christian experience to falter in the belief that it is a very solid reality.

'Full of the Holy Ghost,' as a vessel might be to its brim of golden wine; Christian men and women! does that describe you? Full? A dribbling drop or two in the bottom of the jar. Whose fault is it? Why, with that rushing mighty wind to fill our sails if we like, should we be lying in the sickly calms of the tropics, with the pitch oozing out of the seams, and the idle canvas flapping against the mast? Why, with those tongues of fire hovering over our heads, should we be cowering over grey ashes in which there lives a little spark? Why, with that great rushing tide of the river of the water of life, should we be like the dry watercourses of the desert, with bleached and white stones baking where the stream should be running? 'O! Thou that art named the House of Israel, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened? Are these His doings?'

III. And so, lastly, we are shown how that divine Helper comes to men.

'Full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith.' There is no goodness without the impulse and indwelling of the divine Spirit, and there is no divine Spirit to dwell in a man's heart without that man's trusting in Jesus Christ. The condition of receiving the gift that makes us good is simply and solely that we should put our trust in Jesus Christ the Giver. That opens the door, and the divine Spirit enters.

True! there are convincing operations which He effects upon the world; but these are not in question here. These come prior to, and independent of, faith. But the work of the Spirit of God, present within us to heal and hallow us, has as condition our trust in Jesus Christ, the Great Healer. If you open a chink, the water will come in. If you trust in Jesus Christ, He will give you the new life of His Spirit, which will make you free from the law of sin and death. That divine Spirit 'which they that believe in Him should receive' delights to enter into every heart where His presence is desired. Faith is desire; and desires rooted in faith cannot be in vain. Faith is expectation; and expectations based upon the divine promise can never be disappointed. Faith is dependence, and dependence that reckons upon God, and upon God's gift of His Spirit, will surely be recompensed.

The measure in which we possess the power that makes us good depends altogether upon ourselves. 'Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.' You may have as much of God as you want, and as little as you will. The measure of your faith will determine at once the measure of your goodness, and of your possession of the Spirit that makes good. Just as when the prophet miraculously increased the oil in the cruse, the golden stream flowed as long as they brought vessels, and stayed when there were no more, so as long as we open our hearts for the reception, the gift will not be withheld, but God will not let it run like water spilled upon the ground that cannot be gathered up. If we will desire, if we will expect, if we will reckon on, if we will look to, Jesus Christ, and, beside all this, if we will honestly use the power that we possess, our capacity will grow, and the gift will grow, and our holiness and purity will grow with it.

Some of you have been trying more or less continuously, all your lives, to mend your own characters and improve yourselves. Brethren, there is a better way than that. A modern poet says—

> 'Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
> These three alone lift life to sovereign power.'

Taken by itself that is pure heathenism. Self cannot improve self. Put self into God's keeping, and say, 'I cannot guard, keep, purge, hallow mine own self. Lord, do Thou do it for me!' It is no use to try to build a tower whose top shall reach to heaven. A ladder has been let down on which we may pass upwards, and by which God's angels of grace and beauty will come down to dwell in our hearts. If the Judge is to say of each of us, 'He was a good man,' He must also be able to say, 'He was full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.'

A NICKNAME ACCEPTED

'The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.'—ACTS xi. 26.

NATIONS and parties, both political and religious, very often call themselves by one name, and are known to the outside world by another. These outside names are generally given in contempt; and yet they sometimes manage to hit the very centre of the characteristics of the people on whom they are bestowed, and so by degrees get to be adopted by them, and worn as an honour.

So it has been with the name 'Christian.' It was given at the first by the inhabitants of the Syrian city of Antioch, to a new sort of people that had sprung up amongst them, and whom they could not quite make out. They would not fit into any of their categories, and so they had to invent a new name for them. It is never used in the New Testament by Christians about themselves. It occurs here in this text; it occurs in Agrippa's half-contemptuous exclamation: 'You seem to think it is a very small matter to make me—me, a king!—a Christian, one of those despised people!' And it occurs once more, where the Apostle Peter is specifying the charges brought against them: 'If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf' (1 Peter iv. 16). That sounds like the beginning of the process which has gone on ever since, by which the nickname, flung by the sarcastic men of Antioch, has been turned into the designation by which, all over the world, the followers of Jesus Christ have been proud to call themselves.

Now in this text there are the outside name by which the world calls the followers of Jesus Christ, and one of the many interior names by which the Church called itself. I have thought it might be profitable now to put all the New Testament names for Christ's followers together, and think about them.

I. So, to begin with, we deal with this name given by the world to the Church, which the Church has adopted.

Observe the circumstances under which it was given.

A handful of large-hearted, brave men, anonymous fugitives belonging to the little Church in Jerusalem, had come down to Antioch; and there, without premeditation, without authority, almost without consciousness—certainly without knowing what a great thing they were doing—they took, all at once, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, a great step by preaching the Gospel to pure heathen Greeks; and so began the process by which a small Jewish sect was transformed into a world-wide church. The success of their work in Antioch, amongst the pure heathen population, has for its crowning attestation this, that it compelled the curiosity-hunting, pleasure-loving, sarcastic Antiocheans to find out a new name for this new thing; to write out a new label for the new bottles into which the new wine was being put. Clearly the name shows that the Church was beginning to attract the attention of outsiders.

Clearly it shows, too, that there was a novel element in the Church. The earlier disciples had been all Jews, and could be lumped together along with their countrymen, and come under the same category. But here was something that could not be called either Jew or Greek, because it embraced both. The new name is the first witness to the cosmopolitan character of the primitive Church. Then clearly, too, the name indicates that in a certain dim, confused way, even these superficial observers had got hold of the right notion of what it was that *did* bind these people together. They called them 'Christians'—Christ's men, Christ's followers. But it was only a very dim refraction of the truth that had got to them; they had no notion that 'Christ' was not a proper name, but the designation of an office; and they had no notion that there was anything peculiar or strange in the bond which united its adherents to Christ. Hence they called His followers 'Christians,' just as they would have called Herod's followers 'Herodians,' in the political world, or Aristotle's followers 'Aristotelians' in the philosophical world. Still, in their groping way, they had put their finger on the fact that the one power that held this heterogeneous mass together, the one bond that bound up 'Jew and Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond and free' into one vital unity, was a personal relation to a living Person. And so they said—not understanding the whole significance of it, but having got hold of the right end of the clue—they said, 'They are Christians!' 'Christ's people,' 'the followers of this Christ.'

And their very blunder was a felicity. If they had called them 'Jesuits' that would have meant the followers of the mere man. They did not know how much deeper they had gone when they said, not followers of Jesus, but 'followers of Christ'; for it is not Jesus the Man, but Jesus Christ, the Man with His office, that makes the centre and the bond of the Christian Church.

These, then, are the facts, and the fair inferences from them. A plain lesson here lies on the surface. The Church—that is to say, the men and women who make its members—should draw to itself the notice of the outside world. I do not mean by advertising, and ostentation, and sounding trumpets, and singularities, and affectations. None of all these are needed. If you are live Christians it will be plain enough to outsiders. It is a poor comment on your consistency, if, being Christ's followers, you can go through life unrecognised even by 'them that are without.' What shall we say of leaven which does *not* leaven, or of light which does *not* shine, or of salt which does *not* repel corruption? It is a poor affair if, being professed followers of Jesus Christ, you do not impress the world with the thought that 'here is a man who does not come under any of our categories, and who needs a new entry to describe *him*.' The world ought to have the same impression about you which Haman had about the Jews—'Their laws are diverse from all people.'

Christian professors, are the world's names for each other enough to describe you by, or do you need another name to be coined for you in order to express the manifest characteristics that you display? The Church that does not *provoke* the attention—I use the word in its etymological, not its offensive sense—the Church that does not call upon itself the attention and interest of outsiders, is not a Church as Jesus Christ meant it to be, and it is not a Church that is worth keeping alive; and the sooner it has decent burial the better for itself and for the world!

There is another thing here, viz.: this name suggests that the clear impression made by our conduct and character, as well as by our words, should be that we belong to Jesus Christ. The eye of an outside observer may be unable to penetrate the secret of the deep sweet tie uniting us to Jesus, but there should be no possibility of the most superficial and hasty glance overlooking the fact that we *are* His. He should manifestly be the centre and the guide, the impulse and the pattern, the strength and the reward, of our whole lives. We are Christians. That should be plain for all folks to see, whether we speak or be silent. Brethren, is it so with you? Does your life need no commentary of your words in order that men should know what is the hidden spring that moves all its wheels; what is the inward spirit that co-ordinates all its motions into harmony and beauty? Is it true that like 'the ointment of the right hand which bewrayeth itself,' your allegiance to Jesus Christ, and the overmastering and supreme authority which He exercises upon you, and upon your life, 'cannot be hid'? Do you think that, without your words, if you, living in the way you do, were put down into the middle of Pekin, as these handful of people were put down into the middle of the heathen city of Antioch, the wits of the Chinese metropolis would have to invent a name for you, as the clever men of Antioch did for these people; and do you think that if they had to invent a name, the name that would naturally come to their lips, looking at you, would be 'Christians,' 'Christ's men'? If it would not, there is something wrong.

The last word that I say about this first part of my text is this. It is a very sad thing, but it is one that is always occurring, that the world's inadequate notions of what makes a follower of Jesus Christ get accepted by the Church. Why was it that the name 'Christian' ran all over Christendom in the course of a century and a half? I believe very largely because it was a conveniently vague name; because it did not describe the deepest and sacredest of the bonds that unite us to Jesus Christ. Many a man is quite willing to say, 'I am a Christian,' who would hesitate a long time before he said, 'I am a believer,' 'I am a disciple.' The vagueness of the name, the fact that it erred by defect in not touching the central, deepest relation between man and Jesus Christ, made it very appropriate to the declining spirituality and increasing formalism of the Christian Church in the post-Apostolic age. It is a sad thing when the Church drops its standard down to the world's notion of what it ought to be, and adopts the world's name for itself and its converts.

II. I turn now to set side by side with this vague, general, outside name the more specific and *interior* names—if I may so call them—by which Christ's followers at first knew themselves.

The world said, 'You are Christ's men'; and the names which were self-imposed and are now to be considered might be taken as being the Church's explanation of what the world was fumbling at when it so called them. There are four of them: of course, I can only just touch on them.

(*a*) The first is in this verse—'*disciples.*' The others are *believers, saints, brethren.* These four are the Church's own christening of itself; its explanation and expansion, its deepening and heightening, of the vague name given by the world.

As to the first, *disciples*, any concordance will show that the name was employed almost exclusively during the time of Christ's life upon earth. It is the only name for Christ's followers in the Gospels; it occurs also, mingled with others, in the Acts of the Apostles, and it never occurs thereafter.

The name 'disciple,' then, carries us back to the historical beginning of the whole matter, when Jesus was looked upon as a Rabbi having followers called disciples; just as were John the Baptist and his followers, Gamaliel and his school, or Socrates and his. It sets forth Christ as being the Teacher, and His followers as being His adherents, His scholars, who learned at His feet.

Now that is always true. *We* are Christ's scholars quite as much as were the men who heard and saw with their eyes and handled with their hands, of the Word of Life. Not by words only, but by gracious deeds and fair, spotless life, He taught them and us and all men to the end of time, our highest knowledge of God of whom He is the final revelation, our best knowledge of what men should and shall be by His perfect life in which is contained all morality, our only knowledge of that future in that He has died and is risen and lives to help and still to teach. He teaches us still by the record of His life, and by the living influence of that Spirit whom He sends forth to guide us into all truth. He is the Teacher, the only Teacher, the Teacher for all men, the Teacher of all truth, the Teacher for evermore. He speaks from Heaven. Let us give heed to His voice.

But that Name is not enough to tell all that He is to us, or we to Him, and so after He had passed from earth it unconsciously and gradually dropped out of use by the disciples, as they felt a deepened bond uniting them to Him who was not only their Teacher of the Truth which was Himself, but was their Sacrifice and Advocate with the Father. And for all who hold the, as I believe, essentially imperfect conception of Jesus Christ as being mainly a Teacher, either by word or by pattern; whether it be put into the old form or into the modern form of regarding Him as the Ideal and Perfect Man, it seems to me a fact well worthy of consideration, that the name of disciple and the relation expressed by it were speedily felt by the Christian Church to be inadequate as a representation of the bond that knit them to Him. He is our Teacher, we His scholars. He is more than that, and a more sacred bond unites us to Him. As our Master we owe Him absolute submission. When He speaks, we have to accept His dictum. What He says is truth, pure and entire. His utterance is the last word upon any subject that He touches, it is the ultimate appeal, and the Judge that ends the strife. We owe Him submission, an open eye for all new truth, constant docility, as conscious of our own imperfections, and a confident expectation that He will bless us continuously with high and as yet unknown truths that come from His inexhaustible stores of wisdom and knowledge.

(*b*) Teacher and scholars move in a region which, though it be important, is not the central one. And the word that was needed next to express what the early Church felt Christ was to them, and they to Him, lifts us into a higher atmosphere altogether,—'*believers*,' they who are exercising not merely intellectual submission to the dicta of the Teacher, but who are exercising living trust in the person of the Redeemer. The belief which is faith is altogether a higher thing than its first stage, which is the belief of the understanding. There is in it the moral element of trust. We believe a truth, we trust a Person; and the trust which we are to exercise in Jesus Christ, and which knits us to Him, is our trust in Him, not in any character that we may choose to ascribe to Him, but in the character in which He is revealed in the New Testament—Redeemer, Saviour, Manifest God; and therefore, the Infinite Friend and Helper of our souls.

That trust, my brethren, is the one bond that binds men to God, and the one thing that makes us Christ's men. Apart from it, we may be very near Him, but we are not joined to Him. By it, and by it alone, the union is completed, and His power and His grace flow into our spirits. Are you, not merely a 'Christian,' in the world's notion, being bound in some vague way to

Jesus Christ, but are you a Christian in the sense of trusting your soul's salvation to Him?

(c) Then, still further, there is another name—'*saints*.' It has suffered perhaps more at the hands both of the world and of the Church than any other. It has been taken by the latter and restricted to the dead, and further restricted to those who excel, according to the fantastic, ascetic standard of mediæval Christianity. It has suffered from the world in that it has been used with a certain bitter emphasis of resentment at the claim of superior purity supposed to be implied in it, and so has come to mean on the world's lips one who pretends to be better than other people and whose actions contradict his claim. But the name belongs to all Christ's followers. It makes no claim to special purity, for the central idea of the word 'saint' is not purity. Holiness, which is the English for the Latinised 'sanctity,' holiness which is attributed in the Old Testament to God first, to men only secondarily, does not primarily mean *purity*, but *separation*. God is holy, inasmuch as by that whole majestic character of His, He is lifted above all bounds of creatural limitations, as well as above man's sin. A sacrifice, the Sabbath, a city, a priest's garment, a mitre—all these things are 'holy,' not when they are pure, but when they are devoted to Him. And men are holy, not because they are clean, but because by free self-surrender they have consecrated themselves to Him.

Holiness is consecration, that is to say, holiness is giving myself up to Him to do what He will with. 'I am holy' is not the declaration of my estimate 'I am pure,' but the declaration of the fact 'I am thine, O Lord.' So the New Testament idea of saint has in it these elements—consecration. consecration resting on faith in Christ, and consecration leading to separation from the world and its sin. And that glad yielding of oneself to God, as wooed by His mercies, and thereby drawn away from communion with our evil surroundings and from submission to our evil selves, must be a part of the experience of every true Christian. All His people are saints, not as being pure, but as being given up to Him, in union with whom alone will the cleansing powers flow into their lives and clothe them with 'the righteousness of saints.' Have you thus consecrated yourself to God?

(*d*) The last name is '*brethren*'—a name which has been much maltreated both by the insincerity of the Church, and by the sarcasm of the world. It has been an unreal appellation which has meant nothing and been meant to mean nothing, so that the world has said that our 'brethren' signified a good deal less than their 'brothers.' ''Tis true, 'tis pity; pity 'tis, 'tis true.'

But what I ask you to notice is that the main thing about that name 'brethren' is not the relation of the brethren to one another, but their common relation to their Father.

When we call ourselves as Christian people 'brethren,' we mean first this: that we are the possessors of a supernatural life, which has come from one Father, and which has set us in altogether new relations to one another, and to the world round about us. Do you believe that if you have any of that new life which comes through faith in Jesus Christ, then you are the brethren of all those that possess the same?

As society becomes more complicated, as Christian people grow unlike each other in education, in social position, in occupation, in their general outlook into the world, it is more and more difficult to feel what is nevertheless true: that any two Christian people, however unlike each other, are nearer each other in the very roots of their nature, than a Christian and a non-Christian, however like each other. It is difficult to feel that, and it is getting more and more difficult, but for all that it is a fact.

And now I wish to ask you, Christian men and women, whether you feel more at home with people who love Jesus Christ—as you say that you love Him—or whether you like better to be with people who do not?

There are some of you who choose your intimate associates, whom you ask to your homes and introduce to your children as desirable companions, with no reference at all to their religious character. The duties of your position, of course, oblige each of you to be much among people who do not share your faith, and it is cowardly and wrong to shrink from the necessity. But for Christian people to make choice of heart friends, or close intimates, among those who have no sympathy with their professed belief about, and love to, Jesus Christ, does not say much for the depth and reality of their religion. A man is known by the company he keeps, and if your friends are picked out for other reasons, and their religion is no part of their attraction, it is not an unfair conclusion that there are other things for which you care more than you do for faith in Jesus Christ and love to Him. If you deeply feel the bond that knits you to Christ, and really live near to Him, you will be near to your brethren. You will feel that 'blood is thicker than water,' and however like you may be to irreligious people in many things, you will feel that the deepest bond of all knits you to the poorest, the most ignorant, the most unlike you in social position; ay! and the most unlike you in theological opinion, who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Now that is the sum of the whole matter. And my last word to you is this: Do not you be contented with the world's vague notions of what makes Christ's man. I do not ask you if you are Christians; plenty of you would say: 'Oh yes! of course! Is not this a Christian country? Was not I christened when I was a child? Are we not all members of the Church of England by virtue of our birth? Yes! of course I am!'

I do not ask you that; *I* do not ask you anything; but I pray you to ask yourselves these four questions: Am I Christ's scholar? Am I believing on Him? Am I consecrated to Him? Am I the possessor of a new life from Him? And never give yourselves rest until you can say humbly and yet confidently, 'Yes! thank God, I am!'

THE MARTYRDOM OF JAMES

'Herod killed James the brother of John with the sword.'—ACTS xii. 2.

ONE might have expected more than a clause to be spared to tell the death of a chief man and the first martyr amongst the Apostles. James, as we know, was one of the group of the Apostles who were in especially close connection with Jesus Christ. He is associated in the Gospels with Peter and his brother John, and is always named before John, as if he were the more important of the two, by reason of age or of other circumstances unknown to us. But yet we know next to nothing about him. In the Acts of the Apostles he is a mere lay figure; his name is only mentioned in the catalogue at the beginning, and here again in the brief notice of his death. The reticent and merely incidental character of the notice of his martyrdom is sufficiently remarkable. I think the lessons of the fact, and of the, I was going to say, slight way in which the writer of this book refers to it, may perhaps be most pointedly brought out if we take four contrasts—James and Stephen, James and Peter, James and John, James and James. Now, if we take these four I think we shall learn something.

I. First, then, James and Stephen.

Look at the different scale on which the incidents of the deaths of these two are told: the martyrdom of the one is beaten out over chapters, the martyrdom of the other is crammed into a corner of a sentence. And yet, of the two men, the one who is the less noticed filled the larger place officially, and the other was only a simple deacon and preacher of the Word. The fact that Stephen was the first Christian to follow his Lord in martyrdom is not sufficient to account for the extraordinary difference. The difference is to be sought for in another direction altogether. The Bible cares so little about the people whom it names because its true theme is the works of God, and not of man; and the reason why the 'Acts of the Apostles' kills off one of the chief Apostles in this fashion is simply that, as the writer tells us, his theme is 'all that *Jesus*' continued 'to do and to teach after He was taken up.' Since it is Christ who is the true actor, it matters uncommonly little what becomes of James or of the other ten. This book is *not* the 'Acts of the Apostles,' but it is the Acts of Jesus Christ.

I might suggest, too, in like manner, that there is another contrast which I have not included in my four, between the scale on which the death of Jesus Christ is told by Luke, and that on which this death is narrated. What is the reason why so disproportionate a space of the Gospel is concerned with the last two days of our Lord's life on earth? What is the reason why years are leaped over in silence and moments are spread out in detail, but that the death of a man is only a death, but the death of the Christ is the life of the world? It is little needful that we should have poetical, emotional, picturesque descriptions of martyrdoms and the like in a book which is altogether devoted to tracking the footsteps of Christ in history; and which regards men as nothing more than the successive instruments of His purpose, and the depositories of His grace.

Another lesson which we may draw from the reticence in the case of the Apostle, and the expansiveness in the case of the protomartyr, is that of a wise indifference to the utterly insignificant accident of posthumous memory or oblivion of us and our deeds and sufferings. James sleeps none the less sweetly in his grave, or, rather, wakes none the less triumphantly in heaven, because his life and death are both so scantily narrated. If we 'self-infold the large results' of faithful service, we need not trouble ourselves about its record on earth.

But another lesson which may be learned from this cursory notice of the Apostle's martyrdom is—how small a thing death really is! Looked at from beside the Lord of life and death, which is the point of view of the author of this narrative, 'great death' dwindles to a very little thing. We need to revise our notions if we would understand how trivial it really is. To us it frowns like a black cliff blocking the upper end of our valley, but there is a path round its base, and though the throat of the pass be narrow, it has room for us to get through and up to the sunny uplands beyond. From a mountain top the country below seems level plain, and what looked like an impassable precipice has dwindled to be indistinguishable. The triviality of death, to those who look upon it from the heights of eternity, is well represented by these brief words which tell of the first breach thereby in the circle of the Apostles.

II. There is another contrast, James and Peter.

Now this chapter tells of two things: the death of one of that pair of friends; the miracle that was wrought for the deliverance of the other from death. Why could not the parts have been exchanged, or why could not the miraculous hand that was stretched out to save the one fisherman of Bethsaida have been put forth to save the other? Why should James be slain, and Peter miraculously delivered? A question easily asked; a question not to be answered by us. We may say that the one was more useful for the development of the Church than the other. But we have all seen lives that, to our poor vision, seemed to be all but indispensable, ruthlessly swept away, and lives that seemed to be, and were, perfectly profitless, prolonged to extreme old age. We may say that maturity of character, development of Christian graces, made the man ready for glory. But we have all seen some struck down when anything but ready; and others left for the blessing of mankind many, many a day after they were far fitter for heaven than thousands that, we hope, have gone there.

So all these little explanations do not go down to the bottom of the matter, and we are obliged just to leave the whole question in the loving Hands that hold the keys of life and death for us all. Only we may be sure of this, that James was as dear to Christ as Peter was, and that there was no greater love shown in sending the angel that delivered the one out of the 'hand of Herod and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews,' than was shown in sending the angel that stood behind the headsman and directed the stroke of the fatal sword on the neck of the other.

The one was as dear to the Christ as the other—ay, and the one was as surely, and more blessedly, delivered 'from the mouth of the lion' as the other was, though the one seemed to be dragged from his teeth, and the other seemed to be crushed by his powerful jaws. James escaped from Herod when Herod slew him but could not make him unfaithful to his Master, and his deliverance was not less complete than the deliverance of his friend.

But let us remember, also, that if thus, to two equally beloved, there were dealt out these two different fates, it must be because that evil, which, as I said, is not so great as it looks, is also not so bitter as it tastes, and there is no real evil, for the loving heart, in the stroke that breaks its bands and knits it to Jesus Christ. If we are Christians, the deepest desire of our souls is fuller communion with our Lord. We realise that, in some stunted and scanty measure, by life; but oh! is it not strange that we should shrink from that change which will enable us to realise it fully and eternally? The contrast of James and Peter may teach us the equal love that presides over the life of the living and the death of the dying.

III. Another contrast is that of James and John.

The close union, and subsequent separation by this martyrdom, of that pair of brothers is striking and pathetic. They seem to have together pursued their humble trade of fishermen in the little fishing village of Bethsaida, apparently as working partners with their father Zebedee. They were not divided by discipleship, as was the sad fate of many a brother delivered by a brother to death. If we may attach any weight to the suggestion that the expression in John's narrative, 'He first findeth *his own* brother, Simon,' implies that 'the other disciple' did the same by *his* brother, James was brought to Jesus by John, and new tenderness and strength thereby given to their affection. They were closely associated in their Apostleship, and were together the companions of Jesus in the chief incidents of His life. They were afterwards united in the leadership of the Church. By death they were separated very far: the one the first of all the Apostles to 'become a prey to Satan's rage,' the other 'lingering out his fellows all,' and 'dying in bloodless age,' living to be a hundred years old or more, and looking back through all the long parting to the brother who had joined with him in the wish that even Messiah's Kingdom should not part them, and yet had been parted so soon and parted so long.

Ah! may we not learn the lesson that we should recognise the mercy and wisdom of the ministry of Death the separator, and should tread with patience the lonely road, do calmly the day's work, and tarry till He comes, though those that stood beside us be gone? We may look forward with the assurance that 'God keeps a niche in heaven to hide our idols'; and 'albeit He breaks them to our face,' yet shall we find them again, like Memnon's statue, vocal in the rising sunshine of the heavens.

The brothers, so closely knit, so soon parted, so long separated, were at last reunited. Even to us here, with the chronology of earth still ours, the few years between the early martyrdom of James and the death of the centenarian John seem but a span. The lapse of the centuries that have rolled away since then makes the difference of the dates of the two deaths seem very small, even to us. What a mere nothing it will have looked to them, joined together once more before God!

IV. Lastly, James and James. In his hot youth, when he deserved the name of a son of thunder—so energetic, boisterous, I suppose, destructive perhaps, he was—he and his brother, and their foolish mother, whose name is kindly not told us, go to Christ and say, 'Grant that we may sit, the one on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left, in Thy kingdom.' That was what he wished and hoped for, and what he got was years of service, and a taste of persecution, and finally the swish of the headsman's sword.

And so our dreams get disappointed, and their disappointment is often the road to their fulfilment, for Jesus Christ was answering James' prayer, 'Grant that we may sit on Thy right hand in Thy kingdom,' when He called him to Himself, by the brief and bloody passage of martyrdom. James said, when he did not know what he meant, and the vow was noble though it was ignorant, 'we can drink of the cup that Thou drinkest.' And all honour to him! he stuck to his vow; and when the cup was proffered to him he manfully, and like a Christian, took it and drank it to the dregs; and, I suppose, went silently to his grave. But the change between his ardent anticipations and his calm resignation, and between his foolish dream and the stern reality, may well teach *us* that, whether our wishes be fulfilled or disappointed, they all need to be purified, and that the disappointment of them on earth is often God's way of fulfilling them for us in higher fashion than we dreamed or asked.

So, brethren, let us leave for ourselves, and for all dear ones, that question of living or dying, to His decision. Only let us be sure that whether our lives be long like John's, or short like James', 'living or dying we are the Lord's.' And then, whatever be the length of life or the manner of death, both will bring us the fulfilment of our highest wishes, and will lead us to His side at whose right hand all those shall sit who have loved Him here, and, though long parted, shall be reunited in common enjoyment of the pleasures for evermore which bloom unfading there. 'And so shall we ever be with the Lord.'

PETER'S DELIVERANCE FROM PRISON

'Peter therefore was kept in the prison: but prayer was made earnestly of the Church unto God for him.'—ACTS xii. 5 (R.V.)

THE narrative of Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison is full of little vivid touches which can only have come from himself. The whole tone of it reminds us of the Gospel according to St. Mark, which is in like manner stamped with peculiar minuteness and abundance of detail. One remembers that at a late period in the life of the Apostle Paul, Mark and Luke were together with him; and no doubt in those days in Rome, Mark, who had been Peter's special companion and is called by one of the old Christian writers his 'interpreter,' was busy in telling Luke the details about Peter which appear in the first part of this Book of the Acts.

The whole story seems to me to be full of instruction as well as of picturesque detail; and I desire to bring out the various lessons which appear to me to lie in it.

I. The first of them is this: the strength of the helpless.

Look at that eloquent 'but' in the verse that I have taken as a starting-point: 'Peter therefore was kept in prison, *but* prayer was made earnestly of the Church unto God for him.' There is another similarly eloquent 'but' at the end of the chapter: 'Herod . . . was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost, *but* the Word of God grew and multiplied.' Here you get, on the one hand, all the pompous and elaborate preparations—'four quaternions of soldiers' —four times four is sixteen—sixteen soldiers, two chains, three gates with guards at each of them, Herod's grim determination, the people's malicious expectation of having an execution as a pleasant sensation with which to wind up the Passover Feast. And what had the handful of Christian people? Well, they had prayer; and they had Jesus Christ. That was all, and that is more than enough. How ridiculous all the preparation looks when you let the light of that great 'but' in upon it! Prayer, earnest prayer, 'was made of the Church unto God for him.' And evidently, from the place in which that fact is stated, it is intended that we should say to ourselves that it was *because* prayer was made for him that what came to pass did come to pass. It is not jerked out as an unconnected incident; it is set in a logical sequence. 'Prayer was made earnestly of the Church unto God for him'—and so when Herod would have brought him forth, behold, the angel of the Lord came, and the light shined into the prison. It is the same sequence of thought that occurs in that grand theophany in the eighteenth Psalm, 'My cry entered into His ears; then the earth shook and trembled'; and there came all the magnificence of the thunderstorm and the earthquake and the divine manifestation; and this was the purpose of it all—'He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.' The whole energy of the divine nature is set in motion and comes swooping down from highest heaven to the trembling earth. And of that fact the one end is one poor man's cry, and the other end is his deliverance. The moving spring of the divine manifestation was an individual's prayer; the aim of it was the individual's deliverance. A little water is put into a hydraulic ram at the right place, and the outcome is the lifting of tons. So the helpless men who could only pray are stronger than Herod and his quaternions and his chains and his gates. 'Prayer was made,' therefore all that happened was brought to pass, and Peter was delivered.

Peter's companion, James, was killed off, as we read in a verse or two before. Did not the Church pray for him? Surely they did. Why was their prayer not answered, then? God has not any step-children. James was as dear to God as Peter was. One prayer was answered; was the other left unanswered? It was the divine purpose that Peter, being prayed for, should be delivered; and we may reverently say that, if there had not been the many in Mary's house praying, there would have been no angel in Peter's cell.

So here are revealed the strength of the weak, the armour of the unarmed, the defence of the defenceless. If the Christian Church in its times of persecution and affliction had kept itself to the one weapon that is allowed it, it would have been more conspicuously victorious. And if we, in our individual lives—where, indeed, we have to do something else besides pray—would remember the lesson of that eloquent 'but,' we should be less frequently brought to perplexity and reduced to something bordering on despair. So my first lesson is the strength of the weak.

II. My next is the delay of deliverance.

Peter had been in prison for some time before the Passover, and the praying had been going on all the while, and there was no answer. Day after day 'of the unleavened bread' and of the festival was slipping away. The last night had come; 'and the same night' the light shone, and the angel appeared. Why did Jesus Christ not hear the cry of these poor suppliants sooner? For their sakes; for Peter's sake; for our sakes; for His own sake. For the eventual intervention, at the very last moment, and yet at a sufficiently early moment, tested faith. And look how beautifully all bore the test. The Apostle who was to be killed to-morrow is lying quietly sleeping in his cell. Not a very comfortable pillow he had to lay his head upon, with a chain on each arm and a legionary on each side of him. But he slept; and whilst he was asleep Christ was awake, and the brethren were awake. Their faith was tested, and it stood the test, and thereby was strengthened. And Peter's patience and faith, being tested in like manner and in like manner standing the test, were deepened and confirmed. Depend upon it, he was a better man all his days, because he had been brought close up to Death and looked it in the fleshless eye-sockets, unwinking and unterrified. And I dare say if, long after, he had been asked, 'Would you not have liked to have escaped those two or three days of suspense, and to have been let go at an earlier moment?' he would have said, 'Not for worlds! For I learned in those days that my Lord's time is the best. I learned patience —a lesson which Peter especially needed—'and I learned trust.'

Do you remember another incident, singularly parallel in essence, though entirely unlike in circumstances, to this one? The two weeping sisters at Bethany send their messenger across the Jordan, grudging every moment that he takes to travel to the far-off spot where Jesus is. The message sent is only this: 'He whom Thou lovest is sick.' What an infinite trust in Christ's heart that form of the message showed! They would not say 'Come!'; they would not ask Him to do anything; they did not think that to do so was needful: they were quite sure that what He would do would be right.

And how was the message received? 'Jesus loved Martha and Mary and Lazarus.' Well, did that not make Him hurry as fast as He could to the bedside? No; it rooted Him to the spot. 'He abode, *therefore*' —because He loved them—'two days still in the same place where He was,' to give him plenty of time to die, and the sisters plenty of time to test their confidence in Him. Their confidence does not seem to have altogether stood the test. 'Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died.' 'And why wast Thou *not* here?' is implied. Christ's time was the best time. It was better to get a dead brother back to their arms and to their house than that they should not have lost him for those dreary four days. So delay tests faith, and makes the deliverance, when it comes, not only the sweeter, but the more conspicuously divine. So, brother, 'men ought always to pray, and not to faint'—always to trust that 'the Lord will help them, and that right early.'

III. The next lesson that I would suggest is the leisureliness of the deliverance.

A prisoner escaping might be glad to make a bolt for it, dressed or undressed, anyhow. But when the angel comes into the cell, and the light shines, look how slowly and, as I say, leisurely, he goes about it. 'Put on thy shoes.' He had taken them off, with his girdle and his upper garment, that he might lie the less uncomfortably. 'Put on thy shoes; lace them; make them all right. Never mind about these two legionaries; they will not wake. Gird thyself; tighten thy girdle. Put on thy garment. Do not be afraid. Do not be in a hurry; there is plenty of time. Now, are you ready? Come!' It would have been quite as easy for the angel to have whisked him out of the cell and put him down at Mary's door; but that was not to be the way. Peter was led past all the obstacles—'the first ward,' and the soldiers at it; 'the second ward,' and the soldiers at it; 'and the third gate that leads into the city,' which was no doubt bolted and barred. There was a leisurely procession through the prison.

Why? Because Omnipotence is never in a hurry, and God, not only in His judgments but in His mercies, very often works slowly, as becomes His majesty. 'Ye shall not go out with haste; nor go by flight, for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel shall be your rereward.' We are impatient, and hurry our work over; God works slowly; for He works certainly.

That is the law of the divine working in all regions; and we have to regulate the pace of our eager expectation so as to fall in with the slow, solemn march of the divine purposes, both in regard to our individual salvation and the providences that affect us individually, and in regard to the world's deliverance from the world's evils. 'An inheritance may be gotten hastily in the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.' 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'

IV. We see here, too, the delivered prisoner left to act for himself as soon as possible.

As long as the angel was with Peter, he was dazed and amazed. He did not know—and small blame to him—whether he was sleeping or waking; but he gets through the gates, and out into the empty street, glimmering in the morning twilight, and the angel disappears, and the slumbering city is lying around him. When he is *left* to himself, he *comes* to himself. He could not have passed the wards without a miracle, but he can find his way to Mary's house without one. He needed the angel to bring him as far as the gate and down into the street, but he did not need him any longer. So the angel vanished into the morning light, and then he felt himself, and steadied himself, when responsibility came to him. That is the thing to sober a man. So he stood in the middle of the unpeopled street, and 'he considered the thing,' and found in his own wits sufficient guidance, so that he did not miss the angel. He said to himself, 'I will go to Mary's house.' Probably he did not know that there were any praying there, but it was near, and it was, no doubt, convenient in other respects that we do not know of. The economy of miraculous power is a remarkable feature in Scriptural miracles. God never does anything for us that we could do for ourselves. Not but that our doing for ourselves is, in a deeper sense, His working on us and in us, but He desires us to take the share that belongs to us in completing the deliverance which must begin by supernatural intervention of a Mightier than the angel, even the Lord of angels.

And so this little picture of the angel leading Peter through the prison, and then leaving him to his own common sense and courage as soon as he came out into the street, is just a practical illustration of the great text, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you.'

THE ANGEL'S TOUCH

'And, behold, the angel of the Lord . . . smote Peter. . . . 23. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him [Herod].'—ACTS xii. 7, 23.

THE same heavenly agent performs the same action on Peter and on Herod. To the one, his touch brings freedom and the dropping off of his chains; to the other it brings gnawing agonies and a horrible death. These twofold effects of one cause open out wide and solemn thoughts, on which it is well to look.

I. The one touch has a twofold effect.

So it is always when God's angels come, or God Himself lays His hand on men. Every manifestation of the divine power, every revelation of the divine presence, all our lives' experiences, are charged with the solemn possibility of bringing us one or other of two directly opposite results. They all offer us an alternative, a solemn 'either—or.'

The Gospel too comes charged with that double possibility, and is the intensest and most fateful example of the dual effect of all God's messages and dealings. Just as the ark maimed Dagon and decimated the Philistine cities and slew Uzzah, but brought blessing and prosperity to the house of Obed-edom, just as the same pillar was light to Israel all the night long, but cloud and darkness to the Egyptians, so is Christ set 'for the fall of' some and 'for the rising of' others amidst the 'many in Israel,' and His Gospel is either 'the savour of life unto life or of death unto death,' but in both cases is in itself 'unto God,' one and the same 'sweet savour in Christ.'

II. These twofold effects are parts of one plan and purpose.

Peter's liberation and Herod's death tended in the same direction — to strengthen and conserve the infant Church, and thus to prepare the way for the conquering march of the Gospel. And so it is in all God's self-revelations and manifested energies, whatever may be their effects. They come from one source and one motive, they are fundamentally the operations of one changeless Agent, and, as they are one in origin and character, so they are one in purpose. We are not to separate them into distinct classes and ascribe them to different elements in the divine nature, setting down this as the work of Love and that as the outcome of Wrath, or regarding the acts of deliverance as due to one part of that great whole and the acts of destruction as due to another part of it. The angel was the same, and his celestial fingers were moved by the same calm, celestial will when he smote Peter into liberty and life, and Herod to death.

God changes His ways, but not His heart. He changes His acts, but not His purposes. Opposite methods conduce to one end, as winter storms and June sunshine equally tend to the yellowed harvest.

III. The character of the effects depends on the men who are touched.

As is the man, so is the effect of the angel's touch. It could only bring blessing to the one who was the friend of the angel's Lord, and it could bring only death to the other, who was His enemy. It could do nothing to the Apostle but cause his chains to drop from his wrists, nor anything to the vainglorious king but bring loathsome death.

This, too, is a universal truth. It is we ourselves who settle what God's words and acts will be to us. The trite proverb, 'One man's meat is another man's poison,' is true in the highest regions. It is eminently, blessedly or tragically true in our relation to the Gospel, wherein all God's self-revelation reaches its climax, wherein 'the arm of the Lord' is put forth in its most blessed energy, wherein is laid on each of us the touch, tender and more charged with blessing than that of the angel who smote the calmly sleeping Apostle. That Gospel may either be to us the means of freeing us from our chains, and leading us out of our prison-house into sunshine and security, or be the fatal occasion of condemnation and death. Which it shall be depends on ourselves. Which shall I make it for myself?

'SOBER CERTAINTY'

'And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.'—ACTS xii. 11.

WHERE did Luke get his information of Peter's thoughts in that hour? This verse sounds like first-hand knowledge. Not impossibly John Mark may have been his informant, for we know that both were in Rome together at a later period. In any case, it is clear that, through whatever channels this piece of minute knowledge reached Luke, it must have come originally from Peter himself. And what a touch of naturalness and evident truth it is! No wonder that the Apostle was half dazed as he came from his dungeon, through the prison corridors and out into the street. To be wakened by an angel, and to have such following experiences, would amaze most men.

I. The bewilderment of the released captive.

God's mercies often come suddenly, and with a rush and a completeness that outrun our expectations and our power of immediate comprehension. And sometimes He sends us sorrows in such battalions and so overwhelming that we are dazed for the moment. A Psalmist touched a deep experience when he sang, 'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like unto them that dream.'

The angel has to be gone before we are sure that he was really here. The tumult of emotion in an experience needs to be calmed down before we understand the experience. Reflection discovers more of heaven and of God in the great moments of our lives than was visible to us while we were living through them.

There is one region in which this is especially true—that of the religious life. There sometimes attend its beginnings in a soul a certain excitement and perturbation which disable from calm realising of the greatness of the change which has passed. And it is well when that excitement is quieted down and succeeded by meditative reflection on the treasures that have been poured into the lap, almost as in the dark. No man understands what he has received when he first receives Christ and Christ's gifts. It occupies a lifetime to take possession of that which we possess from the first in Him, and the oldest saint is as far from full possession of the unspeakable and infinite 'gift of God,' as the babes in Christ are.

But, looking more generally at this characteristic of not rightly understanding the great epochs of our lives till they are past, we may note that, while in part it is inevitable and natural, there is an element of fault in it. If we lived in closer fellowship with God, we should live in an atmosphere of continual calm, and nothing, either sorrowful or joyful, would be able so to sweep us off our feet that we should be bewildered by it. Astonishment would never so fill our souls as that we could not rightly appraise events, nor should we need any time, even in the thick of the most wonderful experiences, to 'come to' ourselves and discern the angel.

But if it be so that our lives disclose their meanings best, when we look back on them, how much of the understanding of them, and the drawing of all its sweetness out of each event in them, is entrusted to memory! And how negligent of a great means of happiness and strength we are, if we do not often muse on 'all the way by which God the Lord has led us these many years in the wilderness'! It is needful for Christian progress to 'forget the things that are behind,' and not to let them limit our expectations nor prescribe our methods, but it is quite as needful to remember our past, or rather God's past with us, in order to confirm our grateful faith and enlarge our boundless hope.

II. The disappearance of the angel.

Why did he leave Peter standing there, half dazed and with his deliverance incomplete? He 'led him through one street' only, and 'straightway departed from him.' The Apostle delivered by miracle has now to use his brains. One distinguishing characteristic of New Testament miracles is their economy of miraculous power. Jesus raised Lazarus, for He alone could do that, but other hands must 'loose him and let him go.' He gave life to Jairus's little daughter, but He bid others 'give her something to eat.' God does nothing for us that we can do for ourselves. That economy was valuable as a preservative of the Apostles from the possible danger of expecting or relying on miracles, and as stirring them to use their own energies. Reliance on divine power should not lead us to neglect ordinary means. Alike in the natural and in the spiritual life we have to do our part, and to be sure that God will do His.

III. The symbol here of a greater deliverance.

Fancy may legitimately employ this story as setting forth for us under a lovely image the facts of Christian death, if only we acknowledge that such a use is entirely the work of fancy. But, making that acknowledgment, may we not make the use? Is not

Death, too, God's messenger to souls that love Him, 'mighty and beauteous, though his face be hid'? Would it not be more Christian-like, and more congruous with our eternal hope, if we pictured him thus than by the hideous emblems of our cemeteries and tombs? He comes to Christ's servants, and his touch is gentle though his fingers are icy-cold. He removes only the chains that bind us, and we ourselves are emancipated by his touch. He leads us to 'the iron gate that leadeth into the city,' and it opens to us 'of its own accord.' But he disappears as soon as our happy feet have touched the pavement of that street of the city which is 'pure gold, as transparent as glass,' and in the midst of which flows the river of the crystal-bright 'water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.' Then, when we see the Face as of the sun shining in his strength, we shall come to ourselves, and 'know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel and delivered' us from all our foes and ills for evermore.

RHODA

'A damsel . . . named Rhoda.'—ACTS xii. 13.

'RHODA' means 'a rose,' and *this* rose has kept its bloom for eighteen hundred years, and is still sweet and fragrant! What a lottery undying fame is! Men will give their lives to earn it; and this servant-girl got it by one little act, and never knew that she had it, and I suppose she does not know to-day that, everywhere throughout the whole world where the Gospel is preached, 'this that she hath done is spoken of as a memorial to her.' Is the love of fame worthy of being called 'the last infirmity of noble minds'? Or is it the delusion of ignoble ones? Why need we care whether anybody ever hears of us after we are dead and buried, so long as God knows about us? The 'damsel named Rhoda' was little the better for the immortality which she had unconsciously won.

Now there is a very singular resemblance between the details of this incident and those of another case, when Peter was recognised in dim light by his voice, and the Evangelist Luke, who is the author of the Acts of the Apostles, seems to have had the resemblance between the two scenes — that in the high priest's palace and that outside Mary's door — in his mind, because he uses in this narrative a word which occurs, in the whole of the New Testament, only here and in his account of what took place on that earlier occasion. In both instances a maid-servant recognises Peter by his voice, and in both 'she constantly affirms' that it was so. I do not think that there is anything to be built upon the resemblance, but at all events I think that the use of the same unusual word in the two cases, and nowhere else, seems to suggest that Luke felt how strangely events sometimes double themselves; and how the Apostle who is here all but a martyr is re-enacting, with differences, something like the former scene, when he was altogether a traitor. But, be that as it may, there are some lessons which we may gather from this vivid picture of Rhoda and her behaviour on the one side of the door, while Peter stood hammering, in the morning twilight, on the other.

I. We may notice in the relations of Rhoda to the assembled believers a striking illustration of the new bond of union supplied by the Gospel.

Rhoda was a slave. The word rendered in our version 'damsel' means a female slave. Her name, which is a Gentile name, and her servile condition, make it probable that she was not a Jewess. If one might venture to indulge in a guess, it is not at all unlikely that her mistress, Mary, John Mark's mother, Barnabas' sister, a well-to-do woman of Jerusalem, who had a house large enough to take in the members of the Church in great numbers, and to keep up a considerable establishment, had brought this slave-girl from the island of Cyprus. At all events, she was a slave. In the time of our Lord, and long after, these relations of slavery brought an element of suspicion, fear, and jealous espionage into almost every Roman household, because every master knew that he passed his days and nights among men and women who wanted nothing better than to wreak their vengeance upon him. A man's foes were eminently those of his own household. And now here this child-slave, a Gentile, has been touched by the same mighty love as her mistress; and Mary and Rhoda were kneeling together in the prayer-meeting when Peter began to hammer at the door. Neither woman thought now of the unnatural, unwholesome relation which had formerly bound them. In God's good time, and by the slow process of leavening society with Christian ideas, that diabolical institution perished in Christian lands. Violent reformation of immoralities is always a blunder. 'Raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay.' Settlers in forest lands have found that it is endless work to grub up the trees, or even to fell them. 'Root and branch' reform seldom answers. The true way is to girdle the tree by taking off a ring of bark round the trunk, and letting nature do the rest. Dead trees are easily dealt with; living ones blunt many axes and tire many arms, and are alive after all. Thus the Gospel waged no direct war with slavery, but laid down principles which, once they are wrought into Christian consciousness, made its continuance impossible. But, pending that consummation, the immediate action of Christianity was to ameliorate the condition of the slave. The whole aspect of the ugly thing was changed as soon as master and slave together became the slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel has the same sort of work to do to-day, and there are institutions in full flourishing existence in this and every other civilised community as entirely antagonistic to the spirit and principles of Christianity as Roman slavery was. I, for my part, believe that the one uniting bond and healing medicine for society is found in Jesus Christ; and that in Him, and that the principles deducible from His revelation by word and work, applied to all social evils, are their cure, and their only cure. That slight, girlish figure standing at the door of Mary, her slave and yet her sister in Christ, may be taken as pointing symbolically the way by which the social and civic evils of this day are to be healed, and the war of classes to cease.

II. Note how we get here a very striking picture of the sacredness and greatness of small common duties.

Rhoda came out from the prayer-meeting to open the gate. It was her business, as we say, 'to answer the door,' and so she left off praying to go and do it. So doing, she was the means of delivering the Apostle from the danger which still dogged him. It was of little use to be praying on one side of the shut door when on the other he was standing in the street, and the day was beginning to dawn; Herod's men would be after him as soon as daylight disclosed his escape. The one thing needful for him was to be taken in and sheltered. So the praying group and the girl who stops praying when she hears the knock, to which it was her business to attend, were working in the same direction. It is not necessary to insist that no heights or delights of devotion and secret communion are sufficient excuses for neglecting or delaying the doing of the smallest and most menial task which is our task. If your business is to keep the door, you will not be leaving, but abiding in, the secret place of the Most High, if you get up from your knees in the middle of your prayer, and go down to open it. The smallest, commonest acts of daily life are truer worship than is rapt and solitary communion or united prayer, if the latter can only be secured by the neglect of the former. Better to be in the lower parts of the house attending to the humble duties of the slave than to be in the upper chamber, uniting with the saints in supplication and leaving tasks unperformed.

Let us remember how we may find here an illustration of another great truth, that the smallest things, done in the course of the quiet discharge of recognised duty, and being, therefore, truly worship of God, have in them a certain quality of immortality, and may be eternally commemorated. It was not only the lofty and unique expression of devotion, which another woman gave when she broke the alabaster box to anoint the feet of the Saviour which were to be pierced with nails to-morrow, that has been held worthy of undying remembrance. The name and act of a poor slave girl have been commemorated by that Spirit who preserves nothing in vain, in order that we should learn that things which we vulgarly call great, and those which we insolently call small, are regarded by Him, not according to their apparent magnitude, but according to their motive and reference to Him. He says, 'I will never forget any of their works'; and this little deed of Rhoda's, like the rose petals that careful housekeepers in the country keep upon the sideboard in china bowls to diffuse a fragance through the room, is given us to keep in memory for ever, a witness of the sanctity of common life when filled with acts of obedience to Him.

III. The same figure of the 'damsel named Rhoda' may give us a warning as to the possibility of forgetting very plain duties under the pressure of very legitimate excitement.

'She opened not the door for gladness,' but ran in and told them. And if, whilst she was running in with her message, Herod's quaternions of soldiers had come down the street, there would have been 'no small stir' in the church as to 'what had become of Peter.' He would have gone back to his prison sure enough. Her *first* duty was to open the door; her *second* one was to go and tell the brethren, 'we have got him safe inside'; but in the rush of joyous emotions she naïvely forgot what her first business was, 'lost her head,' as we say, and so went off to tell that he was outside, instead of letting him in. Now joy and sorrow are equally apt to make us forget plain and pressing duties, and we may learn from this little incident the old-fashioned, but always necessary advice, to keep feeling well under control, to use it as impulse, not as guide, and never to let emotion, which should be down in the engine-room, come on deck and take the helm. It is dangerous to obey feeling, unless its decrees are countersigned by calm common sense illuminated by Scripture. Sorrow is apt to obscure duty by its darkness, and joy to do so by its dazzle. It is hard to see the road at midnight, or at midday when the sun is in our eyes. Both need to be controlled. Duty remains the same, whether my heart is beating like a sledge-hammer, or whether 'my bosom's lord sits lightly on its throne.' Whether I am sad or glad, the door that God has given me to watch has to be opened and shut by me. And whether I am a door-keeper in the house of the Lord, like Rhoda in Mary's, or have an office that people think larger and more important, the imperativeness of my duties is equally independent of my momentary emotions and circumstances. Remember, then, that duty remains while feeling fluctuates, and that, sorrowful or joyful, we have still the same Lord to serve and the same crown to win.

IV. Lastly, we have here an instance of a very modest but positive and fully-warranted trust in one's own experience in spite of opposition.

I need not speak about that extraordinary discussion which the brethren got up in the upper room. They had been praying, as has often been remarked, for Peter's deliverance, and now that he is delivered they will not believe it. I am afraid that there is often a dash of unbelief in immediate answers to our prayers mingling with the prayers. And although the petitions in this case were intense and fervent, as the original tells us, and had been kept up all night long, and although their earnestness and worthiness are guaranteed by the fact that they were answered, yet when the veritable Peter, in flesh and blood, stood before the door, the suppliants first said to the poor girl, 'Thou art mad,' and then, 'It is his angel! It cannot be he.' Nobody seems to have thought of going to the door to see whether it was he or not, but they went on arguing with Rhoda as to whether she was right or wrong. The unbelief that alloys even golden faith is taught us in this incident.

Rhoda 'constantly affirmed that it was so,' like the other porteress that had picked out Peter's voice amongst the men huddled round the fire in the high priest's chamber.

The lesson is—trust your own experience, whatever people may have to say against it. If you have found that Jesus Christ can help you, and has loved you, and that your sins have been forgiven, because you have trusted in Him, do not let anybody laugh or talk you out of that conviction. If you cannot argue, do like Rhoda, 'constantly affirm that it is so.' That is the right answer, especially if you can say to the antagonistic party, 'Have you been down to the door, then, to see?' And if they have to say 'No!' then the right answer is, 'You go and look as I did, and you will come back with the same belief which I have.'

So at last they open the door and there he stands. Peter's hammer, hammer, hammer at the gate is wonderfully given in the story. It goes on as a kind of running accompaniment through the talk between Rhoda and the friends. It might have put a stop to the conversation, one would have thought. But Another stands at the door knocking, still more persistently, still more patiently. 'Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If any man open the door I will come in.'

PETER AFTER HIS ESCAPE

'But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him forth out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.'—ACTS xii. 17.

WHEN the angel 'departed from him,' Peter had to fall back on his own wits, and they served him well. He 'considered the thing,' and resolved to make for the house of Mary. He does not seem to have intended to remain there, so dangerously near Herod, but merely to have told its inmates of his deliverance, and then to have hidden himself somewhere, till the heat of the hunt after him was abated. Apparently he did not go into the house at all, but talked to the brethren, when they came trooping after Rhoda to open the gate. The signs of haste in the latter part of the story, where Peter has to think and act for himself, contrast strikingly with the majestic leisureliness of the action of the angel, who gave his successive commands to him to dress completely, as if careless of the sleeping legionaries who might wake at any moment. There was need for haste, for the night was wearing thin, and the streets of Jerusalem were no safe promenade for a condemned prisoner, escaped from his guards.

We do not deal here with the scene in Mary's house and at the gate. We only note, in a word, the touch of nature in Rhoda's forgetting to open 'for gladness,' and so leaving Peter in peril, if a detachment of his guards had already been told off to chase him.

Equally true to nature, alas, is the incredulity of the praying 'many,' when the answer to their prayers was sent to them. They had rather believe that the poor girl was 'mad' or that, for all their praying, Peter was dead, and this was his 'angel,' than that their intense prayer had been so swiftly and completely answered. Is their behaviour not a mirror in which we may see our own?

Very like Peter, as well as very intelligible in the circumstances, is it that he 'continued knocking.' Well he might, and evidently his energetic fusillade of blows was heard even above the clatter of eager tongues, discussing Rhoda's astonishing assertions. Some one, at last, seems to have kept his head sufficiently to suggest that perhaps, instead of disputing whether these were true or not, it might be well to go to the door and see. So they all went in a body, Rhoda being possibly afraid to go alone, and others afraid to stay behind, and there they saw his veritable self. But we notice that there is no sign of his being taken in and refreshed or cared for. He waved an imperative hand, to quiet the buzz of talk, spoke two or three brief words, and departed.

I. Note Peter's account of his deliverance.

We have often had occasion to remark that the very keynote of this Book of Acts is the working of Christ from heaven, which to its writer is as real and efficient as was His work on earth. Peter here traces his deliverance to 'the Lord.' He does not stay to mention the angel. His thoughts went beyond the instrument to the hand which wielded it. Nor does he seem to have been at all astonished at his deliverance. His moment of bewilderment, when he did not know whether he was dreaming or awake, soon passed, and as soon as 'the sober certainty of his waking bliss' settled on his mind, his deliverance seemed to him perfectly natural. What else was it to be expected that 'the Lord' would do? Was it not just like Him? There was nothing to be astonished at, there was everything to be thankful for. That is how Christian hearts should receive the deliverances which the Lord is still working for them.

II. Note Peter's message to the brethren.

James, the Lord's brother, was not an Apostle. That he should have been named to receive the message indicates that already he held some conspicuous position, perhaps some office, in the Church. It may also imply that there were no Apostles in Jerusalem then. We note also that the 'many' who were gathered in Mary's house can have been only a small part of the whole. We here get a little glimpse into the conditions of the life of a persecuted Church, which a sympathetic imagination can dwell on till it is luminous. Such gatherings as would attract notice had to be avoided, and what meetings were held had to be in private houses and with shut doors, through which entrance was not easy. Mary's 'door' had a 'gate' in it, and only that smaller postern, which admitted but one at a time, was opened to visitors, and that after scrutiny. But though assemblies were restricted, communications were kept up, and by underground ways information of events important to the community spread through its members. The consciousness of brotherhood was all the stronger because of the common danger, the universal peril had not made the brethren selfish, but sympathetic. We may note, too, how great a change had come since the time when the Christians were in favour with all the people, and may reflect how fickle are the world's smiles for Christ's servants.

III. Note Peter's disappearance.

All that is said of it is that he 'went into another place.' Probably Luke did not know where he went. It would be prudent at the time to conceal it, and the habit of concealment may have survived the need for it. But two points suggest themselves in regard to the Apostle's flight. There may be a better use for an Apostle than to kill him, and Christ's boldest witnesses are sometimes bound to save themselves by fleeing into another city. To hide oneself 'till the calamity be overpast' may be rank cowardice or commendable prudence. All depends on the circumstances of each case. Prudence is an element in courage, and courage without it is fool-hardiness. There are outward dangers from which it is Christian duty to run, and there are outward dangers which it is Christian duty to face. There are inward temptations which it is best to avoid, as there are others which have to be fought to the death. Peter was as brave and braver when he went and hid himself, than when he boasted, 'Though all should forsake Thee, yet will not I!' A morbid eagerness for martyrdom wrought much harm in the Church at a later time. The primitive Church was free from it.

But we must not omit to note that here Peter is dropped out of the history, and is scarcely heard of any more. We have a glimpse of him in chapter xv., at the Council in Jerusalem, but, with that exception, this is the last mention of him in Acts. How little this Book cares for its heroes! Or rather how it has only one Hero, and one Name which it celebrates, the name of that Lord to whom Peter ascribed his deliverance, and of whom he himself declared that 'there is none other Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved.'

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

THE ACTS

Chap. XIII to End

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TO THE REGIONS BEYOND

'Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and
teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene,
and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul,
2. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me
Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3. And when
they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.
4. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from
thence they sailed to Cyprus. 5. And when they were at Salamis, they preached
the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they had also John to their
minister. 6. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found
a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus: 7. Which
was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man, who called
for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. 8. But Elymas the
sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn
away the deputy from the faith. 9. Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled
with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, 10. And said, O full of all subtilty and
all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not
cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? 11. And now, behold, the hand of
the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season.
And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about
seeking some to lead him by the hand. 12. Then the deputy, when he saw what
was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. 13. Now when
Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia:
and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.'—ACTS xiii. 1-13.

WE stand in this passage at the beginning of a great step forward. Philip and Peter had each played a part in the gradual expansion of the church beyond the limits of Judaism, but it was from the church at Antioch that the messengers went forth who completed the process. Both its locality and its composition made that natural.

I. The solemn designation of the missionaries is the first point in the narrative. The church at Antioch was not left without signs of Christ's grace and presence. It had its band of 'prophets and teachers.' As might be expected, four of the five named are

Hellenists,—that is, Jews born in Gentile lands, and speaking Gentile languages. Barnabas was a Cypriote, Simeon's byname of Niger ('Black') was probably given because of his dark complexion, which was probably caused by his birth in warmer lands. He may have been a North African, as Lucius of Cyrene was. Saul was from Tarsus, and only Manaen remains to represent the pure Palestinian Jew. His had been a strange course, from being foster-brother of the Herod who killed John to becoming a teacher in the church at Antioch. Barnabas was the leader of the little group, and the younger Pharisee from Tarsus, who had all along been Barnabas's *protégé*, brought up the rear.

The order observed in the list is a little window which shows a great deal. The first and last names all the world knows; the other three are never heard of again. Immortality falls on the two, oblivion swallows up the three. But it matters little whether our names are sounded in men's ears, if they are in the Lamb's book of life.

These five brethren were waiting on the Lord by fasting and prayer. Apparently they had reason to expect some divine communication, for which they were thus preparing themselves. Light will come to those who thus seek it. They were commanded to set apart two of their number for 'the work whereunto I have called them.' That work is not specified, and yet the two, like carrier pigeons on being let loose, make straight for their line of flight, and know exactly whither they are to go.

If we strictly interpret Luke's words ('I *have* called them'), a previous intimation from the Spirit had revealed to them the sphere of their work. In that case, the *separation* was only the recognition by the brethren of the divine appointment. The inward call must come first, and no ecclesiastical designation can do more than confirm that. But the solemn designation by the Church identifies those who remain behind with the work of those who go forth; it throws responsibility for sympathy and support on the former, and it ministers strength and the sense of companionship to the latter, besides checking that tendency to isolation which accompanies earnestness. To go forth on even Christian service, unrecognised by the brethren, is not good for even a Paul.

But although Luke speaks of the Church sending them away, he takes care immediately to add that it was the Holy Ghost who 'sent them forth.' Ramsay suggests that 'sent them away' is not the meaning of the phrase in verse 3, but that it should be rendered 'gave them leave to depart.' In any case, a clear distinction is drawn between the action of the Church and that of the Spirit, which constituted Paul's real commission as an Apostle. He himself says that he was an Apostle, 'not from men, neither through man.'

II. The events in the first stage of the journey are next summarily presented. Note the local colouring in 'went *down* to Seleucia,' the seaport of Antioch, at the mouth of the river. The missionaries were naturally led to begin at Cyprus, as Barnabas's birthplace, and that of some of the founders of the church at Antioch.

So, for the first time, the Gospel went to sea, the precursor of so many voyages. It was an 'epoch-making moment' when that ship dropped down with the tide and put out to sea. Salamis was the nearest port on the south-eastern coast of Cyprus, and there they landed,—Barnabas, no doubt, familiar with all he saw;

Saul probably a stranger to it all. Their plan of action was that to which Paul adhered in all his after work,—to carry the Gospel to the Jew first, a proceeding for which the manner of worship in the synagogues gave facilities. No doubt, many such were scattered through Cyprus, and Barnabas would be well known in most.

They thus traversed the island from east to west. It is noteworthy that only now is John Mark's name brought in as their attendant. He had come with them from Antioch, but Luke will not mention him when he is telling of the sending forth of the other two, because Mark was not sent by the Spirit, but only chosen by his uncle, and his subsequent defection did not affect the completeness of their embassy. His entirely subordinate place is made obvious by the point at which he appears.

Nothing of moment happened on the tour till Paphos was reached. That was the capital, the residence of the pro-consul, and the seat of the foul worship of Venus. There the first antagonist was met. It is not Sergius Paulus, pro-consul though he was, who is the central figure of interest to Luke, but the sorcerer who was attached to his train. His character is drawn in Luke's description, and in Paul's fiery exclamation. Each has three clauses, which fall 'like the beats of a hammer.' 'Sorcerer, false prophet, Jew,' make a climax of wickedness. That a Jew should descend to dabble in the black art of magic, and play tricks on the credulity of ignorant people by his knowledge of some simple secrets of chemistry; that he should pretend to prophetic gifts which in his heart he knew to be fraud, and should be recreant to his ancestral faith, proved him to deserve the penetrating sentence which Paul passed on him. He was a trickster, and knew that he was: his inspiration came from an evil source; he had come to hate righteousness of every sort.

Paul was not flinging bitter words at random, or yielding to passion, but was laying the black heart bare to the man's own eyes, that the seeing himself as God saw him might startle him into penitence. 'The corruption of the best is the worst.' The bitterest enemies of God's ways are those who have cast aside their early faith. A Jew who had stooped to be a juggler was indeed causing God's 'name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles.'

He and Paul each recognised in the other his most formidable foe. Elymas instinctively felt that the pro-consul must be kept from listening to the teaching of these two fellow-countrymen, and 'sought to *pervert* him from the faith,' therein *perverting* (the same word is used in both cases) 'the right ways of the Lord'; that is, opposing the divine purpose. He was a specimen of a class who attained influence in that epoch of unrest, when the more cultivated and nobler part of Roman society had lost faith in the old gods, and was turning wistfully and with widespread expectation to the mysterious East for enlightenment.

So, like a ship which plunges into the storm as soon as it clears the pier-head, the missionaries felt the first dash of the spray and blast of the wind directly they began their work. Since this was their first encounter with a foe which they would often have to meet, the duel assumes importance, and we understand not only the fulness of the narrative, but the miracle which assured Paul and Barnabas of Christ's help, and was meant to diffuse its encouragement along the line of their future work. For Elymas it was chastisement, which might lead him to cease to pervert the ways of the Lord, and himself begin to walk in them. Perhaps, after a season, he did see 'the better Sun.'

Saul's part in the incident is noteworthy. We observe the vivid touch, he 'fastened his eyes on him.' There must have been something very piercing in the fixed gaze of these flashing eyes. But Luke takes pains to prevent our thinking that Paul spoke from his own insight or was moved by human passion. He was 'filled with the Holy Ghost,' and, as His organ, poured out the scorching words that revealed the cowering apostate to himself, and announced the merciful punishment that was to fall. We need to be very sure that we are similarly filled before venturing to imitate the Apostle's tone.

III. The shifting of the scene to the mainland presents some noteworthy points. It is singular that there is no preaching mentioned as having been attempted in Perga, or anywhere along the coast, but that the two evangelists seem to have gone at once across the great mountain range of Taurus to Antioch of Pisidia.

A striking suggestion is made by Ramsay to the effect that the reason was a sudden attack of the malarial fever which is endemic in the low-lying coast plains, and for which the natural remedy is to get up among the mountains. If so, the journey to Antioch of Pisidia may not have been in the programme to which John Mark had agreed, and his return to Jerusalem may have been due to this departure from the original intention. Be that as it may, he stands for us as a beacon, warning against hasty entrance on great undertakings of which we have not counted the cost, no less than against cowardly flight from work, as soon as it begins to involve more danger or discomfort than we had reckoned on.

John Mark was willing to go a-missionarying as long as he was in Cyprus, where he was somebody and much at home, by his relationship to Barnabas; but when Perga and the climb over Taurus into strange lands came to be called for, his zeal and courage oozed out at his finger-ends, and he skulked back to his mother's house at Jerusalem. No wonder that Paul 'thought not good to take with them him who withdrew from them.' But even such faint hearts as Mark's may take courage from the fact that he nobly retrieved his youthful error, and won back Paul's confidence, and proved himself 'profitable to him for the ministry.'

WHY SAUL BECAME PAUL

'Saul (who also is called Paul)' . . .—Acts xiii. 9.

Hitherto the Apostle has been known by the former of these names, henceforward he is known exclusively by the latter. Hitherto he has been second to his friend Barnabas, henceforward he is first. In an earlier verse of the chapter we read that 'Barnabas and Saul' were separated for their missionary work, and again, that it was 'Barnabas and Saul' for whom the governor of Cyprus sent, to hear the word of the Lord. But in a subsequent verse of the chapter we read that 'Paul and his company loosed from Paphos.'

The change in the order of the names is significant, and the change in the names not less so. Why was it that at this period the Apostle took up this new designation? I think that the coincidence between his name and that of the governor of Cyprus, who believed at his preaching, Sergius Paulus, is too remarkable to be accidental. And though, no doubt, it was the custom for the Jews of that day, especially for those of them who lived in Gentile lands, to have, for convenience' sake, two names, one Jewish and one Gentile—one for use amongst their brethren, and one for use amongst the heathen—still we have no distinct intimation that the Apostle bore a Gentile name before this moment. And the fact that the name which he bears now is the same as that of his first convert, seems to me to point the explanation.

I take it, then, that the assumption of the name of Paul instead of the name of Saul occurred at this point, stood in some relation to his missionary work, and was intended in some sense as a memorial of his first victory in the preaching of the Gospel.

I think that there are lessons to be derived from the substitution of one of these names for the other which may well occupy us for a few moments.

I. First of all, then, the new name expresses a new nature.

Jesus Christ gave the Apostle whom He called to Himself in the early days, a new name, in order to prophesy the change which, by the discipline of sorrow and the communication of the grace of God, should pass over Simon Barjona, making him into a Peter, a 'Man of Rock.' With characteristic independence, Saul chooses for himself a new name, which shall express the change that he feels has passed over his inmost being. True, he does not assume it at his conversion, but that is no reason why we should not believe that he assumes it because he is beginning to understand what it is that has happened to him at his conversion.

The fact that he changes his name as soon as he throws himself into public and active life, is but gathering into one picturesque symbol his great principle; 'If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away and all things are become new.'

So, dear brethren, we may, from this incident before us, gather this one great lesson, that the central heart of Christianity is the possession of a new life, communicated to us through faith in that Son of God, Who is the Lord of the Spirit. Wheresoever there is a true faith, there is a new nature. Opinions may play upon the surface of a man's soul, like moonbeams on the silver sea, without raising its temperature one degree or sending a single beam into its dark caverns. And that is the sort of Christianity that satisfies a great many of you—a Christianity of opinion, a Christianity of surface creed, a Christianity which at the best slightly modifies some of your outward actions, but leaves the whole inner man unchanged.

Paul's Christianity meant a radical change in his whole nature. He went out of Jerusalem a persecutor, he came into Damascus a Christian. He rode out of Jerusalem hating, loathing, despising Jesus Christ; he groped his way into Damascus, broken, bruised, clinging contrite to His feet, and clasping His Cross as his only hope. He went out proud, self-reliant, pluming himself upon his many prerogatives, his blue blood, his pure descent, his Rabbinical knowledge, his Pharisaical training, his external religious earnestness, his rigid morality; he rode into Damascus blind in the eyes, but seeing in the soul, and discerning that all these things were, as he says in his strong, vehement way, 'but dung' in comparison with his winning Christ.

And his theory of conversion, which he preaches in all his Epistles, is but the generalisation of his own personal experience, which suddenly, and in a moment, smote his old self to shivers, and raised up a new life, with new tastes, views, tendencies, aspirations, with new allegiance to a new King. Such changes, so sudden, so revolutionary, cannot be expected often to take place amongst people who, like us, have been listening to Christian teaching all our lives. But unless there be this infusion of a new life into men's spirits which shall make them love and long and aspire after new things that once they did not care for, I know not why we should speak of them as being Christians at all. The transition is described by Paul as 'passing from death unto life.' That cannot be a surface thing. A change which needs a new name must be a profound change. Has our Christianity revolutionised our nature in any such fashion? It is easy to be a Christian after the superficial fashion which passes muster with so many of us. A verbal acknowledgment of belief in truths which we never think about, a purely external performance of acts of worship, a subscription or two winged by no sympathy, and a fairly respectable life beneath the cloak of which all evil may burrow undetected—make the Christianity of thousands. Paul's Christianity transformed him; does yours transform you? If it does not, are you quite sure that it *is* Christianity at all?

II. Then, again, we may take this change of name as being expressive of a life's work.

Paul is a Roman name. He strips himself of his Jewish connections and relationships. His fellow-countrymen who lived amongst the Gentiles were, as I said at the beginning of these remarks, in the habit of doing the same thing; but they carried *both* their names; their Jewish for use amongst their own people, their Gentile one for use amongst Gentiles. Paul seems to have altogether disused his old name of Saul. It was almost equivalent to seceding from Judaism. It is like the acts of the renegades whom one sometimes hears of, who are found by travellers, dressed in turban and flowing robes, and bearing some Turkish name, or like some English sailor, lost to home and kindred, who deserts his ship in an island of the Pacific, and drops his English name for a barbarous title, in token that he has given up his faith and his nationality.

So Paul, contemplating for his life's work preaching amongst the Gentiles, determines at the beginning, 'I lay down all of which I used to be proud. If my Jewish descent and privileges stand in my way I cast them aside. "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law, a Pharisee,"—all these I wrap together in one bundle, and toss them behind me that I may be the better able to help some to whom they would have hindered my access.' A man with a heart will throw off his silken robes that his arm may be bared to rescue, and his feet free to run to succour.

So we may, from the change of the Apostle's name, gather this lesson, never out of date, that the only way to help people is to go down to their level. If you want to bless men, you must identify yourself with them. It is no use standing on an eminence above them, and patronisingly talking down to them. You cannot scold, or hector, or lecture men into the possession and acceptance of religious truth if you take a position of superiority. As our Master has taught us, if we want to make blind beggars see we must take the blind beggars by the hand.

The spirit which led the Apostle to change the name of Saul, with its memories of the royal dignity which, in the person of its great wearer, had honoured his tribe, for a Roman name is the same which he formally announces as a deliberately adopted law of his life. 'To them that are without law I became as without law . . . that I might gain them that are without law . . . I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.'

It is the very inmost principle of the Gospel. The principle that influenced the servant in this comparatively little matter, is the principle that influenced the Master in the mightiest of all events. 'He who was in the form of God, and thought not equality with God a thing to be eagerly snatched at, made Himself of no reputation, and was found in fashion as a man and in form as a servant, and became obedient unto death.' 'For as much as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise took part of the same'; and the mystery of incarnation came to pass, because when the Divine would help men, the only way by which the Infinite love could reach its end was that the Divine should become man; identifying Himself with those whom He would help, and stooping to the level of the humanity that He would lift.

And as it is the very essence and heart of Christ's work, so, my brother, it is the condition of all work that benefits our fellows. It applies all round. We must stoop if we would raise We must put away gifts, culture, everything that distinguishes us, and come to the level of the men that we seek to help. Sympathy is the parent of all wise counsel, because it is the parent of all true understanding of our brethren's wants. Sympathy is the only thing to which people will listen, sympathy is the only disposition correspondent to the message that we Christians are entrusted with. For a Christian man to carry the Gospel of Infinite condescension to his fellows in a spirit other than that of the Master and the Gospel which he speaks, is an anomaly and a contradiction.

And, therefore, let us all remember that a vast deal of so-called Christian work falls utterly dead and profitless, for no other reason than this, that the doers have forgotten that they must come to the level of the men whom they would help, before they can expect to bless them.

You remember the old story of the heroic missionary whose heart burned to carry the Gospel of Jesus Christ amongst captives, and as there was no other way of reaching them, let himself be sold for a slave, and put out his hands to have the manacles fastened upon them. It is the law for all Christian service; become like men if you will help them,—'To the weak as weak, all things to all men, that we might by all means save some.'

And, my brother, there was no obligation on Paul's part to do Christian work which does not lie on you.

III. Further, this change of name is a memorial of victory.

The name is that of Paul's first convert. He takes it, as I suppose, because it seemed to him such a blessed thing that at the very moment when he began to sow, God helped him to reap. He had gone out to his work, no doubt, with much trembling, with weakness and fear. And lo! here, at once, the fields were white already to the harvest.

Great conquerors have been named from their victories; Africanus, Germanicus, Nelson of the Nile, Napier of Magdala, and the like. Paul names himself from the first victory that God gives him to win; and so, as it were, carries ever on his breast a memorial of the wonder that through him it had been given to preach, and that not without success, amongst the Gentiles 'the unsearchable riches of Christ.'

That is to say, this man thought of it as his highest honour, and the thing best worthy to be remembered about his life, that God had helped him to help his brethren to know the common Master. Is that your idea of the best thing about a life? What would you, a professing Christian, like to have for an epitaph on your grave? 'He was rich; he made a big business in Manchester'; 'He was famous, he wrote books'; 'He was happy and fortunate'; or, 'He turned many to righteousness'? This man flung away his literary tastes, his home joys, and his personal ambition, and chose as that for which he would live, and by which he would fain be remembered, that he should bring dark hearts to the light in which he and they together walked.

His name, in its commemoration of his first success, would act as a stimulus to service and to hope. No doubt the Apostle, like the rest of us, had his times of indolence and languor, and his times of despondency when he seemed to have laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought. He had but to say 'Paul' to find the antidote to both the one and the other, and in the remembrance of the past to find a stimulus for service for the future, and a stimulus for hope for the time to come. His first convert was to him the first drop that predicts the shower, the first primrose that prophesies the wealth of yellow blossoms and downy green leaves that will fill the woods in a day or two. The first convert 'bears in his hand a glass which showeth many more.' Look at the workmen in the streets trying to get up a piece of the roadway. How difficult it is to lever out the first paving stone from the compacted mass! But when once it has been withdrawn, the rest is comparatively easy. We can understand Paul's triumph and joy over the first stone which he had worked out of the strongly cemented wall and barrier of heathenism; and his conviction that having thus made a breach, if it were but wide enough to let the end of his lever in, the fall of the whole was only a question of time. I suppose that if the old alchemists had turned but one grain of base metal into gold they might have turned tons, if only they had had the retorts and the appliances with which to do it. And so, what has brought one man's soul into harmony with God, and given one man the true life, can do the same for all men. In the first fruits we may see the fields whitening to the harvest. Let us rejoice then, in any little work that God helps us to do, and be sure that if so great be the joy of the first fruits, great beyond speech will be the joy of the ingathering.

IV. And now last of all, this change of name is an index of the spirit of a life's work.

'Paul' means 'little'; 'Saul' means 'desired.' He abandons the name that prophesied of favour and honour, to adopt a name that bears upon its very front a profession of humility. His very name is the condensation into a word of his abiding conviction: 'I am less than the least of all saints.' Perhaps even there may be an allusion to his low stature, which may be pointed at in the sarcasm of his enemies that his letters were strong, though his bodily presence was 'weak.' If he was, as Renan calls him, 'an ugly little Jew,' the name has a double appropriateness.

But, at all events, it is an expression of the spirit in which he sought to do his work. The more lofty the consciousness of his vocation the more lowly will a true man's estimate of himself be. The higher my thought of what God has given me grace to do, the more shall I feel weighed down by the consciousness of my unfitness to do it. And the more grateful my remembrance of what He has enabled me to do, the more shall I wonder that I have been enabled, and the more profoundly shall I feel that it is not my strength but His that has won the victories.

So, dear brethren, for all hope, for all success in our work, for all growth in Christian grace and character, this disposition of lowly self-abasement and recognised unworthiness and infirmity is absolutely indispensable. The mountain-tops that lift themselves to the stars are barren, and few springs find their rise there. It is in the lowly valleys that the flowers grow and the rivers run. And it is they who are humble and lowly in heart to whom God gives strength to serve Him, and the joy of accepted service.

I beseech you, then, learn your true life's task. Learn how to do it by identifying yourselves with the humbler brethren whom you would help. Learn the spirit in which it must be done; the spirit of lowly self-abasement. And oh! above all, learn this, that unless you have the new life, the life of God in your hearts, you have no life at all.

Have you, my brother, that faith by which we receive into our spirits Christ's own Spirit, to be our life? If you have, then you are a new creature, with a new name, perhaps but dimly visible and faintly audible, amidst the imperfections of earth, but sure to shine out on the pages of the Lamb's Book of Life; and to be read 'with tumults of acclaim' before the angels of Heaven. 'I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it.'

JOHN MARK

'. . . John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem.'—Acts xiii. 13.

The few brief notices of John Mark in Scripture are sufficient to give us an outline of his life, and some inkling of his character. He was the son of a well-to-do Christian woman in Jerusalem, whose house appears to have been the resort of the brethren as early as the period of Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison. As the cousin of Barnabas he was naturally selected to be the attendant and secular factotum of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. For some reason, faint-heartedness, lack of interest, levity of disposition, or whatever it may have been, he very quickly abandoned that office and returned to his home. His kindly-natured and indulgent relative sought to reinstate him in his former position on the second journey of Paul and himself. Paul's kinder severity refused to comply with the wish of his colleague Barnabas, and so they part, and Barnabas and Mark sail away to Cyprus, and drop out of the Acts of the Apostles. We hear no more about him until near the end of the Apostle Paul's life, when the Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon show him as again the companion of Paul in his captivity. He seems to have left him in Rome, to have gone to Asia Minor for a space, to have returned to the Apostle during his last imprisonment and immediately prior to his death, and then to have attached himself to the Apostle Peter, and under his direction and instruction to have written his Gospel.

Now these are the bones of his story; can we put flesh and blood upon them: and can we get any lessons out of them? I think we may; at any rate I am going to try.

I. Consider then, first, his—what shall I call it? well, if I may use the word which Paul himself designates it by, in its correct signification, we may call it his—apostasy.

It was not a departure from Christ, but it was a departure from very plain duty. And if you will notice the point of time at which Mark threw up the work that was laid upon him, you will see the reason for his doing so. The first place to which the bold evangelists went was Cyprus. Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, which was perhaps the reason for selecting it as the place in which to begin the mission. For the same reason, because it was the native place of his relative, it would be very easy work for John Mark as long as they stopped in Cyprus, among his friends, with people that knew him, and with whom no doubt he was familiar. But as soon as they crossed the strait that separated the island from the mainland, and set foot upon the soil of Asia Minor, so soon he turned tail; like some recruit that goes into battle, full of fervour. but as soon as the bullets begin to 'ping' makes the best of his way to the rear. He was quite ready for missionary work as long as it was easy work; quite ready to do it as long as he was moving upon known ground and there was no great call upon his heroism, or his self-sacrifice; he does not wait to test the difficulties, but is frightened by the imagination of them, does not throw himself into the work and see how he gets on with it, but before he has gone a mile into the land, or made any real experience of the perils and hardships, has had quite enough of it, and goes away back to his mother in Jerusalem.

Yes, and we find exactly the same thing in all kinds of strenuous life. Many begin to run, but one after another, as 'lap' after 'lap' of the racecourse is got over, has had enough of it, and drops on one side; a hundred started, and at the end the field is reduced to three or four. All you men that have grey hairs on your heads can remember many of your companions that set out in the course with you, 'did run well' for a little while: what has become of them? This thing hindered one, the other thing hindered another; the swiftly formed resolution died down as fast as it blazed up; and there are perhaps some three or four that, 'by patient continuance in well-doing,' have been tolerably faithful to their juvenile ideal; and to use the homely word of the homely Abraham Lincoln, kept 'pegging away' at what they knew to be the task that was laid upon them.

This is very 'threadbare' morality, very very familiar and old-fashioned teaching; but I am accustomed to believe that no teaching is threadbare until it is practised; and that however well-worn the platitudes may be, you and I want them once again unless we have obeyed them, and done all which they enjoin.

And so in regard to every career which has in it anything of honour and of effort, let John Mark teach us the lesson not swiftly to begin and inconsiderately to venture upon a course, but once begun to let nothing discourage, 'nor bate one jot of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer right onward.'

And still further and more solemnly still, how like this story is to the experience of hundreds and thousands of young Christians! Any man who has held such an office as I hold, for as many years as I have filled it, will have his memory full—and, may I say, his eyes not empty—of men and women who began like this man, earnest, fervid, full of zeal, and who, like him, have slackened in their work; who were Sunday-school teachers, workers amongst the poor, I know not what, when they were young men and women, and who now are idle and unprofitable servants.

Some of you, dear brethren, need the word of exhortation and earnest beseeching to contrast the sluggishness, the indolence of your present, with the brightness and the fervour of your past. And I beseech you, do not let your Christian life be like that snow that is on the ground about us to-day—when it first lights upon the earth, radiant and white, but day by day gets more covered with a veil of sooty blackness until it becomes dark and foul.

Many of us have to acknowledge that the fervour of early days has died down into coldness. The river that leapt from its source rejoicing, and bickered amongst the hills in such swift and musical descent, creeps sluggish and almost stagnant amongst the flats of later life, or has been lost and swallowed up altogether in the thirsty and encroaching sands of a barren worldliness. Oh! my friends, let us all ponder this lesson, and see to it that no repetition of the apostasy of this man darken our Christian lives and sadden our Christian conscience.

II. And now let me ask you to look next, in the development of this little piece of biography, to Mark's eclipse.

Paul and Barnabas differed about how to treat the renegade. Which of them was right? Would it have been better to have put him back in his old post, and given him another chance, and said nothing about the failure; or was it better to do what the sterner wisdom of Paul did, and declare that a man who had once so forgotten himself and abandoned his work was not the man to put in the same place again? Barnabas' highest quality, as far as we know, was a certain kind of broad generosity and rejoicing to discern good in all men. He was a 'son of consolation'; the gentle kindness of his natural disposition, added to the ties of relationship, influenced him in his wish regarding his cousin Mark. He made a mistake. It would have been the cruellest thing that could have been done to his relative to have put him back again without acknowledgment, without repentance, without his riding quarantine for a bit, and holding his tongue for a while. He would not then have known his fault as he ought to have known it, and so there would never have been the chance of his conquering it.

The Church manifestly sympathised with Paul, and thought that he took the right view; for the contrast is very significant between the unsympathising silence which the narrative records as attending the departure of Barnabas and Mark—'Barnabas took Mark, and sailed away to Cyprus'—and the emphasis with which it tells us that the other partner in the dispute, Paul 'took Silas and departed, being recommended by the brethren to the grace of God.'

The people at Antioch had no doubt who was right, and I think they were right in so deciding. So let us learn that God treats His renegades as Paul treated Mark, and not as Barnabas would have treated him. He is ready, even infinitely ready, to forgive and to restore, but desires to see the consciousness of the sin first, and desires, before large tasks are re-committed to hands that once have dropped them, to have some kind of evidence that the hands have grown stronger and the heart purified from its cowardice and its selfishness. Forgiveness does not mean impunity. The infinite mercy of God is not mere weak indulgence which so deals with a man's failures and sins as to convey the impression that these are of no moment whatsoever. And Paul's severity which said: 'No, such work is not fit for such hands until the heart has been "broken and healed,"' is of a piece with God's severity which is love. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.' Let us learn the difference between a weak charity which loves too foolishly, and therefore too selfishly, to let a man inherit the fruit of his doings, and the large mercy which knows how to take the bitterness out of the chastisement, and yet knows how to chastise.

And still further, this which I have called Mark's eclipse may teach us another lesson, viz., that the punishment for shirking work is to be denied work, just as the converse is true. that in God's administration of the world and of His Church, the reward for faithful work is to get more to do, and the filling a narrower sphere is the sure way to have a wider sphere to fill. So if a man abandons plain duties, then he will get no work to do. And that is why so many Christian men and women are idle in this world; and stand in the market-place, saying, with a certain degree of truth, 'No man hath hired us.' No; because so often in the past tasks have been presented to you, forced upon you, almost pressed into your unwilling hands, that you have refused to take; and you are not going to get any more. You have been asked to work, —I speak now to professing Christians—duties have been pressed upon you, fields of service have opened plainly before you, and you have not had the heart to go into them. And so you stand idle all the day now, and the work goes to other people that will do it. Thus God honours them, and passes you by.

Mark sails away to Cyprus, he does not go back to Jerusalem; he and Barnabas try to get up some little schismatic sort of mission of their own. Nothing comes of it; nothing ought to have come of it. He drops out of the story; he has no share in the joyful conflicts and sacrifices and successes of the Apostle. When he heard how Paul, by God's help, was flaming like a meteor from East to West, do you not think he wished that he had not been such a coward? When the Lord was opening doors, and he saw how the work was prospering in the hands of ancient companions, and Silas filled the place that he might have filled, if he had been faithful to God, do you not think the bitter thought occupied his mind, of how he had flung away what never could come back to him now? The punishment of indolence is absolute idleness.

So, my friends, let us learn this lesson, that the largest reward that God can give to him that has been faithful in a few things, is to give him many things to be faithful over. Beware, all of you professing Christians, lest to you should come the fate of the slothful servant with his one buried talent, to whom the punishment of burying it unused was to lose it altogether; according to that solemn word which was fulfilled in the temporal sphere in this story on which I am commenting: 'To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away.'

III. Again consider the process of recovery.

Concerning it we read nothing indeed in Scripture; but concerning it we know enough to be able at least to determine what its outline must have been. The silent and obscure years of compulsory inactivity had their fruit, no doubt. There is only one road, with well-marked stages, by which a backsliding or apostate Christian can return to his Master. And that road has three halting-places upon it, through which the heart must pass if it have wandered from its early faith, and falsified its first professions. The first of them is the consciousness of the fall, the second is the resort to the Master for forgiveness; and the last is the deepened consecration to Him.

The patriarch Abraham, in a momentary lapse from faith to sense, thought himself compelled to leave the land to which God had sent him, because a famine threatened; and when he came back from Egypt, as the narrative tells us with deep significance, he went to the 'place where he had pitched his tent at the beginning; to the altar which he had reared at the first.' Yes, my friends, we must begin over again, tread all the old path, enter by the old wicket-gate, once more take the place of the penitent, once more make acquaintance with the pardoning Christ, once more devote ourselves in renewed consecration to His service. No man that wanders into the wilderness but comes back by the King's highway, if he comes back at all.

IV. And so lastly, notice the reinstatement of the penitent renegade.

If you turn at your leisure to the remaining notices of John Mark in Scripture, you will find, in two of Paul's Epistles of the captivity, viz., those to the Colossians and Philemon, references to him; and these references are of a very interesting and beautiful nature. Paul says that in Rome Mark was one of the four born Jews who had been a cordial and a comfort to him in his imprisonment. He commends him, in the view of a probable journey, to the loving reception of the church at Colosse, as if they knew something derogatory to his character, the impression of which the Apostle desired to remove. He sends to Philemon the greetings of the repentant renegade in strange juxtaposition with the greetings of two other men, one who was an apostate at the end of his career instead of at the beginning, and of whom we do not read that he ever came back, and one who all his life long is the type of a faithful friend and companion. 'Mark, Demas, Luke' are bracketed as greeting Philemon; the first a runaway that came back, the second a fugitive who, so far as we know, never returned, and the last the faithful friend throughout.

And then in Paul's final Epistle, and in almost the last words of it, we read his request to Timothy. 'Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.' The first notice of him was: 'They had John to their minister'; the last word about him is: 'he is profitable for the ministry.' The Greek words in the original are not identical, but their meaning is substantially the same. So notwithstanding the failure notwithstanding the wise refusal of Paul years before to have anything more to do with him, he is now reinstated in his old office, and the aged Apostle, before he dies, would like to have the comfort of his presence once more at his side. Is not the lesson out of that, this eternal Gospel that even early failures, recognised and repented of, may make a man better fitted for the tasks from which once he fled? Just as they tell us—I do not know whether it is true or not, it will do for an illustration—just as they tell us that a broken bone renewed is stronger at the point of fracture than it ever was before, so the very sin that we commit, when once we know it for a sin, and have brought it to Christ for forgiveness, may minister to our future efficiency and strength. The Israelites fought twice upon one battlefield. On the first occasion they were shamefully defeated; on the second, on the same ground, and against the same enemies, they victoriously emerged from the conflict, and reared the stone which said, 'Ebenezer!' 'Hitherto the Lord hath helped us.'

And so the temptations which have been sorest may be overcome, the sins into which we most naturally fall we may put our foot upon; the past is no specimen of what the future may be. The page that is yet to be written need have none of the blots of the page that we have turned over shining through it. Sin which we have learned to know for sin and to hate, teaches us humility, dependence, shows us where our weak places are. Sin which is forgiven knits us to Christ with deeper and more fervid love, and results in a larger consecration. Think of the two ends of this man's life—flying like a frightened hare from the very first suspicion of danger or of difficulty, sulking in his solitude, apart from all the joyful stir of consecration and of service; and at last made an evangelist to proclaim to the whole world the story of the Gospel of the Servant. God works with broken reeds, and through them breathes His sweetest music.

So, dear brethren, 'Take with you words, and return unto the Lord; say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously,' and the answer will surely be:—'I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely; I will be as the dew unto Israel.'

THE FIRST PREACHING IN ASIA MINOR

'Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. 27. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. 28. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. 29. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. 30. But God raised Him from the dead: 31. And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people. 32. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, 33. God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee. 34. And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. 35. Wherefore He saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 36. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37. But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. 38. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: 39. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.'—Acts xiii. 26-39.

The extended report of Paul's sermon in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia marks it, in accordance with Luke's method, as the first of a series. It was so because, though the composition of the audience was identical with that of those in the synagogues of Cyprus, this was the beginning of the special work of the tour, the preaching in the cities of Asia Minor. The part of the address contained in the passage falls into three sections,—the condensed narrative of the Gospel facts (vs. 26-31), the proof that the resurrection was prophesied (vs. 32-37), and the pungent personal application (v. 38 to end).

I. The substance of the narrative coincides, as it could not but do, with Peter's sermons, but yet with differences, partly due to the different audience, partly to Paul's idiosyncrasy. After the preceding historical *résumé*, he girds himself to his proper work of proclaiming the Gospel, and he marks the transition in verse 26 by reiterating his introductory words.

His audience comprised the two familiar classes of Jews and Gentile proselytes, and he seeks to win the ears of both. His heart goes out in his address to them all as 'brethren,'and in his classing himself and Barnabas among them as receivers of the message which he has to proclaim. What skill, if it were not something much more sacred, even humility and warm love, lies in that 'to *us* is the word of this salvation sent'! He will not stand above them as if he had any other possession of his message than they might have. He, too, has received it, and what he is about to say is not his word, but God's message to them and him. That is the way to preach.

Notice, too, how skilfully he introduces the narrative of the rejection of Jesus as the reason why the message has now come to them his hearers away in Antioch. It is 'sent forth' 'to us,' Asiatic Jews, *for* the people in the sacred city would not have it. Paul does not prick his hearers' consciences, as Peter did, by charging home the guilt of the rejection of Jesus on them. They had no share in that initial crime. There is a faint purpose of dissociating himself and his hearers from the people of Jerusalem, to whom the Dispersion were accustomed to look up, in the designation, 'they that dwell in Jerusalem, and *their* rulers.' Thus far the Antioch Jews had had hands clean from that crime; they had now to choose whether they would mix themselves up with it.

We may further note that Paul says nothing about Christ's life of gentle goodness, His miracles or teaching, but concentrates attention on His death and resurrection. From the beginning of his ministry these were the main elements of his 'Gospel' (1 Cor. xv. 3, 4). The full significance of that death is not declared here. Probably it was reserved for subsequent instruction. But it and the Resurrection, which interpreted it, are set in the forefront, as they should always be. The main point insisted on is that the men of Jerusalem were fulfilling prophecy in slaying Jesus. With tragic deafness, they knew not the voices of the prophets, clear and unanimous as they were, though they heard them every Sabbath of their lives, and yet they fulfilled them. A prophet's words had just been read in the synagogue; Paul's words might set some hearer asking whether a veil had been over his heart while his ears had heard the sound of the word.

The Resurrection is established by the only evidence for a historical fact, the testimony of competent eyewitnesses. Their competence is established by their familiar companionship with Jesus during His whole career; their opportunities for testing the reality of the fact, by the 'many days' of His appearances.

Paul does not put forward his own testimony to the Resurrection, though we know, from 1 Corinthians xv. 8, that he regarded Christ's appearance to him as being equally valid evidence with that afforded by the other appearances; but he distinguishes between the work of the Apostles, as 'witnesses unto the people'—that is, the Jews of Palestine—and that of Barnabas and himself. They had to bear the message to the regions beyond. The Apostles and he had the same work, but different spheres.

II. The second part turns with more personal address to his hearers. Its purport is not so much to preach the Resurrection, which could only be proved by testimony, as to establish the fact that it was the fulfilment of the promises to the fathers. Note how the idea of fulfilled prophecy runs in Paul's head. The Jews had *fulfilled* it by their crime; God *fulfilled* it by the Resurrection. This reiteration of a key-word is a mark of Paul's style in his Epistles, and its appearance here attests the accuracy of the report of his speech.

The second Psalm, from which Paul's first quotation is made, is prophetic of Christ, inasmuch as it represents in vivid lyrical language the vain rebellion of earthly rulers against Messiah, and Jehovah's establishing Him and His kingdom by a steadfast decree. Peter quoted its picture of the rebels, as fulfilled in the coalition of Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish rulers against Christ. The Messianic reference of the Psalm, then, was already seen; and we may not be going too far if we assume that Jesus Himself had included it among things written in the Psalms 'concerning Himself,' which He had explained to the disciples after the Resurrection. It depicts Jehovah speaking to Messiah, *after* the futile attempts of the rebels: 'This day have I begotten Thee.' That day is a definite point in time. The Resurrection was a birth from the dead; so Paul, in Colossians i. 18, calls Jesus 'the first begotten from the dead.' Romans i. 4, 'declared to be the Son of

God . . . by the resurrection from the dead,' is the best commentary on Paul's words here.

The second and third quotations must apparently be combined, for the second does not specifically refer to resurrection, but it promises to 'you,' that is to those who obey the call to partake in the Messianic blessings, a share in the 'sure' and enduring 'mercies of David'; and the third quotation shows that not 'to see corruption' was one of these 'mercies.' That implies that the speaker in the Psalm was, in Paul's view, David, and that his words were his believing answer to a divine promise. But David was dead. Had the 'sure mercy' proved, then, a broken reed? Not so: for Jesus, who is Messiah, and is God's 'Holy One' in a deeper sense than David was, has not seen corruption. The Psalmist's hopes are fulfilled in Him, and through Him, in all who will 'eat' that their 'souls may live.'

III. But Paul's yearning for his brethren's salvation is not content with proclaiming the fact of Christ's resurrection, nor with pointing to it as fulfilling prophecy; he gathers all up into a loving, urgent offer of salvation for every believing soul, and solemn warning to despisers. Here the whole man flames out. Here the characteristic evangelical teaching, which is sometimes ticketed as 'Pauline' by way of stigma, is heard. Already had he grasped the great antithesis between Law and Gospel. Already his great word 'justified' has taken its place in his terminology. The essence of the Epistles to Romans and Galatians is here. Justification is the being pronounced and treated as not guilty. Law cannot justify. 'In Him' we are justified. Observe that this is an advance on the previous statement that 'through Him' we receive remission of sins.

'In Him' points, though but incidentally and slightly, to the great truth of incorporation with Jesus, of which Paul had afterwards so much to write. The justifying in Christ is complete and absolute. And the sole sufficient condition of receiving it is faith. But the greater the glory of the light the darker the shadow which it casts. The broad offer of complete salvation has ever to be accompanied with the plain warning of the dread issue of rejecting it. Just because it is so free and full, and to be had on such terms, the warning has to be rung into deaf ears, 'Beware *therefore!*' Hope and fear are legitimately appealed to by the Christian evangelist. They are like the two wings which may lift the soul to soar to its safe shelter in the Rock of Ages.

LUTHER—A STONE ON THE CAIRN

'For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37. But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.'—ACTS xiii. 36, 37.

I TAKE these words as a motto rather than as a text. You will have anticipated the use which I purpose to make of them in connection with the Luther Commemoration. They set before us, in clear sharp contrast, the distinction between the limited, transient work of the servants and the unbounded, eternal influence of the Master. The former are servants, and that but for a time; they do their work, they are laid in the grave, and as their bodies resolve into their elements, so their influence, their teaching, the institutions which they may have founded, disintegrate and decay. He lives. His relation to the world is not as theirs: He is 'not for an age, but for all time.'

Death is not the end of His work. His Cross is the eternal foundation of the world's hope. His life is the ultimate, perfect revelation of the divine Nature which can never be surpassed, or fathomed, or antiquated. Therefore the last thought, in all commemorations of departed teachers and guides, should be of Him who gave them all the force that they had; and the final word should be: 'They were not suffered to continue by reason of death, this Man continueth ever.'

In the same spirit then as the words of my text, and taking them as giving me little more than a starting-point and a framework, I draw from them some thoughts appropriate to the occasion.

I. First, we have to think about the limited and transient work of this great servant of God.

The miner's son, who was born in that little Saxon village four hundred years ago, presents at first sight a character singularly unlike the traditional type of mediæval Church fathers and saints. Their ascetic habits, and the repressive system under which they were trained, withdraw them from our sympathy; but this sturdy peasant, with his full-blooded humanity, unmistakably a man, and a man all round, is a new type, and looks strangely out of place amongst doctors and mediæval saints.

His character, though not complex, is many-sided and in some respects contradictory. The face and figure that look out upon us from the best portraits of Luther tell us a great deal about the man. Strong, massive, not at all elegant; he stands there, firm and resolute, on his own legs, grasping a *Bible* in a muscular hand There is plenty of animalism—a source of power as well as of weakness—in the thick neck; an iron will in the square chin; eloquence on the full, loose lips;

a mystic, dreamy tenderness and sadness in the steadfast eyes—altogether a true king and a leader of men!

The first things that strike one in the character are the iron will that would not waver, the indomitable courage that knew no fear, the splendid audacity that, single-handed, sprang into the arena for a contest to the death with Pope, Emperors, superstitions, and devils; the insight that saw the things that were 'hid from the wise and prudent,' and the answering sincerity that would not hide what he saw, nor say that he saw what he did not.

But there was a great deal more than that in the man. He was no mere brave revolutionary, he was a cultured scholar, abreast of all the learning of his age, capable of logic-chopping and scholastic disputation on occasion, and but too often the victim of his own over-subtle refinements. He was a poet, with a poet's dreaminess and waywardness, fierce alternations of light and shade, sorrow and joy. All living things whispered and spoke to him, and he walked in communion with them all. Little children gathered round his feet, and he had a big heart of love for all the weary and the sorrowful.

Everybody knows how he could write and speak. He made the German language, as we may say, lifting it up from a dialect of boors to become the rich, flexible, cultured speech that it is. And his Bible, his single-handed work, is one of the colossal achievements of man; like Stonehenge or the Pyramids. 'His words were half-battles,' 'they were living creatures that had hands and feet'; his speech, direct, strong, homely, ready to borrow words from the kitchen or the gutter, is unmatched for popular eloquence and impression. There was music in the man. His flute solaced his lonely hours in his home at Wittemberg; and the Marseillaise of the Reformation, as that grand hymn of his has been called, came, words and music, from his heart. There was humour in him, coarse horseplay often; an honest, hearty, broad laugh frequently, like that of a Norse god. There were coarse tastes in him, tastes of the peasant folk from whom he came, which clung to him through life, and kept him in sympathy with the common people, and intelligible to them. And withal there was a constitutional melancholy, aggravated by his weary toils, perilous fightings, and fierce throes, which led him down often into the deep mire where there was no standing; and which sighs through all his life. The penitential Psalms and Paul's wail: 'O wretched man that I am,' perhaps never woke more plaintive echo in any human heart than they did in Martin Luther's.

Faults he had, gross and plain as the heroic mould in which he was cast. He was vehement and fierce often; he was coarse and violent often. He saw what he did see so clearly, that he was slow to believe that there was anything that he did not see. He was oblivious of counterbalancing considerations, and given to exaggerated, incautious, unguarded statements of precious truths. He too often aspired to be a driver rather than a leader of men; and his strength of will became obstinacy and tyranny. It was too often true that he had dethroned the pope of Rome to set up a pope at Wittemberg. And foul personalities came from his lips, according to the bad controversial fashion of his day, which permitted a licence to scholars that we now forbid to fishwives.

All that has to be admitted; and when it is all admitted, what then? This is a fastidious generation;

Erasmus is its heroic type a great deal more than Luther—I mean among the cultivated classes of our day—and that very largely because in Erasmus there is no quick sensibility to religious emotion as there is in Luther, and no inconvenient fervour. The faults are there—coarse, plain, palpable—and perhaps more than enough has been made of them. Let us remember, as to his violence, that he was following the fashion of the day; that he was fighting for his life; that when a man is at death-grips with a tiger he may be pardoned if he strikes without considering whether he is going to spoil the skin or not; and that on the whole you cannot throttle snakes in a graceful attitude. Men fought then with bludgeons; they fight now with dainty polished daggers, dipped in cold, colourless poison of sarcasm. Perhaps there was less malice in the rougher old way than in the new.

The faults are there, and nobody who is not a fool would think of painting that homely Saxon peasant-monk's face without the warts and the wrinkles. But it is quite as unhistorical, and a great deal more wicked, to paint nothing but the warts and wrinkles; to rake all the faults together and make the most of them; and present them in answer to the question: 'What sort of a man was Martin Luther?'

As to the work that he did, like the work of all of us, it had its limitations, and it will have its end. The impulse that he communicated, like all impulses that are given from men, will wear out its force. New questions will arise of which the dead leaders never dreamed, and in which they can give no counsel. The perspective of theological thought will alter, the centre of interest will change, a new dialect will begin to be spoken. So it comes to pass that all religious teachers and thinkers are left behind, and that their words are preserved and read rather for their antiquarian and historical interest than because of any impulse or direction for the present which may linger in them; and if they founded institutions, these too, in their time, will crumble and disappear.

But I do not mean to say that the truths which Luther rescued from the dust of centuries, and impressed upon the conscience of Teutonic Europe, are getting antiquated. I only mean that his connection with them and his way of putting them, had its limitations and will have its end: 'This man, having served his own generation by the will of God, was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption.'

What *were* the truths, what was his contribution to the illumination of Europe, and to the Church? Three great principles—which perhaps closer analysis might reduce to one; but which for popular use, on such an occasion as the present, had better be kept apart—will state his service to the world.

There were three men in the past who, as it seems to me, reach out their hands to one another across the centuries—Paul, St. Augustine, and Martin Luther. The three very like each other, all three of them joining the same subtle speculative power with the same capacity of religious fervour, and of flaming up at the contemplation of divine truth; all of them gifted with the same exuberant, and to fastidious eyes, incorrect eloquence; all three trained in a school of religious thought of which each respectively was destined to be the antagonist and all but the destroyer.

The young Pharisee, on the road to Damascus, blinded, bewildered, with all that vision flaming upon him, sees in its light his past, which he thought had been so pure, and holy, and God-serving, and amazedly discovers that it had been all a sin and a crime, and a persecution of the divine One. Beaten from every refuge, and lying there, he cries: 'What wouldst Thou have me to do, Lord?'

The young Manichean and profligate in the fourth century, and the young monk in his convent in the fifteenth, passed through a similar experience;—different in form, identical in substance—with that of Paul the persecutor. And so Paul's Gospel, which was the description and explanation, the rationale, of his own experience, became their Gospel; and when Paul said: 'Not by works of righteousness which our own hands have done, but by His mercy He saved us' (Titus iii. 5), the great voice from the North African shore, in the midst of the agonies of barbarian invasions and a falling Rome, said 'Amen. Man lives by faith,' and the voice from the Wittemberg convent, a thousand years after, amidst the unspeakable corruption of that phosphorescent and decaying Renaissance, answered across the centuries, 'It is true!' 'Herein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.' Luther's word to the world was Augustine's word to the world; and Luther and Augustine were the echoes of Saul of Tarsus—and Paul learned his theology on the Damascus road, when the voice bade him go and proclaim 'forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me' (Acts xxvi. 18). That is Luther's first claim on our gratitude, that he took this truth from the shelves where it had reposed, dust-covered, through centuries, that he lifted this truth from the bier where it had lain, smothered with sacerdotal garments, and called with a loud voice, 'I say unto thee, arise!' and that now the commonplace of Christianity is this: All men are sinful men, justice condemns us all, our only hope is God's infinite mercy, that mercy comes to us all in Jesus Christ that died for us, and he that gets that into his heart by simple faith, he is forgiven, pure, and he is an heir of Heaven.

There are other aspects of Christian truth which Luther failed to apprehend. The Gospel is, of course, not merely a way of reconciliation and forgiveness. He pushed his teaching of the uselessness of good works as a means of salvation too far. He said rash and exaggerated things in his vehement way about the 'justifying power' of faith alone. Doubtless his language was often overstrained, and his thoughts one-sided, in regard to subjects that need very delicate handling and careful definition. But after all this is admitted, it remains true that his strong arm tossed aside the barriers and rubbish that had been piled across the way by which prodigals could go home to their Father, and made plain once more the endless mercy of God, and the power of humble faith. He was right when he declared that whatever heights and depths there may be in God's great revelation, and however needful it is for a complete apprehension of the truth as it is in Jesus that these should find their place in the creed of Christendom, still the firmness with which that initial truth of man's sinfulness and his forgiveness and acceptance through simple faith in Christ is held, and the clear earnestness with which it is proclaimed, are the test of a standing or a falling Church.

And then closely connected with this central principle, and yet susceptible of being stated separately, are the other two; of neither of which do I think it necessary to say more than a word. Following on that great discovery—for it was a discovery—by the monk in his convent, of justification by faith, there comes the other principle of the entire sweeping away of all priesthood, and the direct access to God of every individual Christian soul. There are no more external rites to be done by a designated and separate class. There is one sacrificing Priest, and one only, and that is Jesus Christ, who has sacrificed Himself for us all, and there are no other priests, except in the sense in which every Christian man is a priest and minister of the most high God. And no man comes between me and my Father; and no man has power to do anything for me which brings me any grace, except in so far as mine own heart opens for the reception, and mine own faith lays hold of the grace given.

Luther did not carry that principle so far as some of us modern Nonconformists carry it. He left illogical fragments of sacramentarian and sacerdotal theories in his creed and in his Church. But, for all that, we owe mainly to him the clear utterance of that thought, the warm breath of which has thawed the ice chains which held Europe in barren bondage. Notwithstanding the present portentous revival of sacerdotalism, and the strange turning again of portions of society to these beggarly elements of the past, I believe that the figments of a sacrificing priesthood and sacramental efficacy will never again permanently darken the sky in this land, the home of the men who speak the tongue of Milton, and owe much of their religious and political freedom to the reformation of Luther.

And the third point, which is closely connected with these other two, is this, the declaration that every illuminated Christian soul has a right and is bound to study God's Word without the Church at his elbow to teach him what to think about it. It was Luther's great achievement that, whatever else he did, he put the Bible into the hands of the common people. In that department and region, his work perhaps bears more distinctly the traces of limitation and imperfection than anywhere else, for he knew nothing—how could he?—of the difficult questions of this day in regard to the composition and authority of Scripture, nor had he thought out his own system or done full justice to his own principle.

He could be as inquisitorial and as dogmatic as any Dominican of them all. He believed in force; he was as ready as all his fellows were to invoke the aid of the temporal power. The idea of the Church, as helped and sustained—which means fettered, and weakened, and paralysed — by the civic government, bewitched him as it did his fellows. We needed to wait for George Fox, and Roger Williams, and more modern names still, before we understood fully what was involved in the rejection of priesthood, and the claim that God's Word should speak directly to each Christian soul. But for all that, we largely owe to Luther the creed that looks in simple faith to Christ, a Church without a priest, in which every man is a priest of the Most High,—the only true democracy that the world will ever see—and a Church in which the open Bible and the indwelling Spirit are the guides of every humble soul within its pale. These are his claims on our gratitude.

Luther's work had its limitations and its imperfections, as I have been saying to you. It will become less and less conspicuous as the ages go on. It cannot be otherwise. That is the law of the world. As a whole green forest of the carboniferous era is represented now in the rocks by a thin seam of coal, no thicker than a sheet of paper, so the stormy lives and the large works of the men that have gone before, are compressed into a mere film and line, in the great cliff that slowly rises above the sea of time and is called the history of the world.

II. Be it so; be it so! Let us turn to the other thought of our text, the perpetual work of the abiding Lord.

'He whom God raised up saw no corruption.' It is a fact that there are thousands of men and women in the world to-day who have a feeling about that nineteen-centuries-dead Galilean carpenter's son that they have about no one else. All the great names of antiquity are but ghosts and shadows, and all the names in the Church and in the world, of men whom we have not seen, are dim and ineffectual to us. They may evoke our admiration, our reverence, and our wonder, but none of them can touch our hearts. But here is this unique, anomalous fact that men and women by the thousand love Jesus Christ, the dead One, the unseen One, far away back there in the ages, and feel that there is no mist of oblivion between them and Him.

That is because He does for you and me what none of these other men can do. Luther preached about the Cross; Christ *died* on it. 'Was Paul crucified for you?' there is the secret of His undying hold upon the world. The further secret lies in this, that He is not a past force but a present one. He is no exhausted power but a power mighty to-day; working in us, around us, on us, and for us—a living Christ. 'This Man whom God raised up from the dead saw no corruption,' the others move away from us like figures in a fog, dim as they pass into the mists, having a blurred half-spectral outline for a moment, and then gone.

Christ's death has a present and a perpetual power. He has 'offered one sacrifice for sins for ever'; and no time can diminish the efficacy of His Cross, nor our need of it, nor the full tide of blessings which flow from it to the believing soul. Therefore do men cling to Him to-day as if it was but yesterday that He had died for them. When all other names carved on the world's records have become unreadable, like forgotten inscriptions on decaying grave-stones, His shall endure for ever, deep graven on the fleshly tables of the heart. His revelation of God is the highest truth. Till the end of time men will turn to His life for their clearest knowledge and happiest certainty of their Father in heaven. There is nothing limited or local in His character or works. In His meek beauty and gentle perfectness, He stands so high above us all that, to-day, the inspiration of His example and the lessons of His conduct touch us as much as if He had lived in this generation, and will always shine before men as their best and most blessed law of conduct. Christ will not be antiquated till He is outgrown, and it will be some time before that happens.

But Christ's power is not only the abiding influence of His earthly life and death. He is not a past force, but a present one. He is putting forth fresh energies to-day, working in and for and by all who love Him. We believe in a living Christ.

Therefore the final thought, in all our grateful commemoration of dead helpers and guides, should be of the undying Lord. He sent whatsoever power was in them. He is with His Church to-day, still giving to men the gifts needful for their times. Aaron may die on Hor, and Moses be laid in his unknown grave on Pisgah, but the Angel of the Covenant, who is the true Leader, abides in the pillar of cloud and fire, Israel's guide in the march, and covering shelter in repose. That is our consolation in our personal losses when our dear ones are 'not suffered to continue by reason of death.' He who gave them all their sweetness is with us still, and has all the sweetness which He lent them for a time. So if we have Christ with us we cannot be desolate. Looking on all the men, who in their turn have helped forward His cause a little way, we should let their departure teach us His presence, their limitations His all-sufficiency, their death His life.

Luther was once found, at a moment of peril and fear, when he had need to grasp unseen strength, sitting in an abstracted mood, tracing on the table with his finger the words '*Vivit! vivit!*'—'He lives! He lives!' It is our hope for ourselves, and for God's truth, and for mankind. Men come and go; leaders, teachers, thinkers speak and work for a season and then fall silent and impotent. He abides. They die, but He lives. They are lights kindled, and therefore sooner or later quenched, but He is the true light from which they draw all their brightness, and He shines for evermore. Other men are left behind and, as the world glides forward, are wrapped in ever-thickening folds of oblivion, through which they shine feebly for a little while, like lamps in a fog, and then are muffled in invisibility. We honour other names, and the coming generations will forget them, but 'His name shall endure for ever, His name shall continue as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in Him; all nations shall call Him blessed.'

JEWISH REJECTERS AND GENTILE RECEIVERS

'And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. 45. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. 46. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. 47. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. 48. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. 49. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. 50. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 51. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. 52. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

'And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. 2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. 3. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the Apostles. 5. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, 6. They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: 7. And there they preached the Gospel.' —Acts xiii. 44-52; xiv. 1-7.

In general outline, the course of events in the two great cities of Asia Minor, with which the present passage is concerned, was the same. It was only too faithful a forecast of what was to be Paul's experience everywhere. The stages are: preaching in the synagogue, rejection there, appeal to the Gentiles, reception by them, a little nucleus of believers formed; disturbances fomented by the Jews, who swallow their hatred of Gentiles by reason of their greater hatred of the Apostles, and will riot with heathens, though they will not pray nor eat with them; and finally the Apostles' departure to carry the gospel farther afield. This being the outline, we have mainly to consider any special features diversifying it in each case.

Their experience in Antioch was important, because it forced Paul and Barnabas to put into plain words, making very clear to themselves as well as to their hearers, the law of their future conduct. It is always a step in advance when circumstances oblige us to formularise our method of action. Words have a wonderful power in clearing up our own vision. Paul and Barnabas had known all along that they were sent to the Gentiles; but a conviction in the mind is one thing, and the same conviction driven in on us by facts is quite another. The discipline of Antioch crystallised floating intentions into a clear statement, which henceforth became the rule of Paul's conduct. Well for us if we have open eyes to discern the meaning of difficulties, and promptitude and decision to fix and speak out plainly the course which they prescribe!

The miserable motives of the Jews' antagonism are forcibly stated in vs. 44, 45. They did not 'contradict and blaspheme,' because they had taken a week to think over the preaching and had seen its falseness, but simply because, dog-in-the-manger like, they could not bear that 'the whole city' should be welcome to share the message. No doubt there was a crowd of 'Gentile dogs' thronging the approach to the synagogue; and one can almost see the scowling faces and hear the rustle of the robes drawn closer to avoid pollution. Who were these wandering strangers that they should gather such a crowd? And what had the uncircumcised rabble of Antioch to do with 'the promises made to the fathers'? It is not the only time that religious men have taken offence at crowds gathering to hear God's word. Let us take care that we do not repeat the sin. There are always some who—

'Taking God's word under wise protection,
Correct its tendency to diffusiveness.'

It needed some courage to front the wild excitement of such a mob, with calm, strong words likely to increase the rage.

'Lo, we turn to the Gentiles.' This is not to be regarded as announcing a general course of action, but simply as applying to the actual rejecters in Antioch. The necessity that the word should first be spoken to the Jews continued to be recognised, in each new sphere of work, by the Apostle; but wherever, as here, men turned from the message, the messengers turned from them without further waste of time. Paul put into words here the law for his whole career. The fit punishment of rejection is the withdrawal of the offer. There is something pathetic in the persistence with which, in place after place, Paul goes through the same sequence, his heart yearning over his brethren according to the flesh, and hoping on, after all repulses. It was far more than natural patriotism; it was an offshoot of Christ's own patient love.

Note also the divine command. Paul bases his action on a prophecy as to the Messiah. But the relation on which prophecy insists between the personal servant of Jehovah and the collective Israel, is such that the great office of being the Light of the world devolves from Him on it and the true Israel is to be a light to the Gentiles. These very Jews in Antioch, lashing themselves into fury because Gentiles were to be offered a share in Israel's blessings, ought to have been discharging this glorious function. Their failure showed that they were no parts of the real Israel. No doubt the two missionaries left the synagogue as they spoke, and, as the door swung behind them, it shut hope out and unbelief in. The air was fresh outside, and eager hearts welcomed the word. Very beautifully is the gladness of the Gentile hearers set in contrast with the temper of the Jews. It is strange news to heathen hearts that there is a God who loves them, and a divine Christ who has died for them. The experience of many a missionary follows Paul's here.

'As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.' The din of many a theological battle has raged round these words, the writer of which would have probably needed a good deal of instruction before he could have been made to understand what the fighting was about. But it is to be noted that there is evidently intended a contrast between the envious Jews and the gladly receptive Gentiles, which is made more obvious by the repetition of the words 'eternal life.' It would seem much more relevant and accordant with the context to understand the word rendered 'ordained' as meaning 'adapted' or 'fitted,' than to find in it a reference to divine foreordination. Such a meaning is legitimate, and strongly suggested by the context. The reference then would be to the 'frame of mind of the heathen, and not to the decrees of God.'

The only points needing notice in the further developments at Antioch are the agents employed by the Jews, the conduct of the Apostles, and the sweet little picture of the converts. As to the former, piously inclined women in a heathen city would be strongly attracted by Judaism and easily lend themselves to the impressions of their teachers. We know that many women of rank were at that period powerfully affected in this manner; and if a Rabbi could move a Gentile of influence through whispers to the Gentile's wife, he would not be slow to do it. The ease with which the Jews stirred up tumults everywhere against the Apostle indicates their possession of great influence; and their willingness to be hand in glove with heathen for so laudable an object as crushing one of their own people who had become a heretic, measures the venom of their hate and the depth of their unscrupulousness.

The Apostles had not to fear violence, as their enemies were content with turning them out of Antioch and its neighbourhood; but they obeyed Christ's command, shaking off the dust against them, in token of renouncing all connection. The significant act is a trace of early knowledge of Christ's words, long before the date of our Gospels.

While the preachers had to leave the little flock in the midst of wolves, there was peace in the fold. Like the Ethiopian courtier when deprived of Philip, the new believers at Antioch found that the withdrawal of the earthly brought the heavenly Guide. 'They were filled with joy.' What! left ignorant, lonely, ringed about with enemies, how could they be glad? Because they were filled 'with the Holy Ghost.' Surely joy in such circumstances was no less supernatural a token of His presence than rushing wind or parting flames or lips opened to speak with tongues. God makes us lonely that He may Himself be our Companion.

It was a long journey to the great city of Iconium. According to some geographers, the way led over savage mountains; but the two brethren tramped along, with an unseen Third between them, and that Presence made the road light. They had little to cheer them in their prospects, if they looked with the eye of sense; but they were in good heart, and the remembrance of Antioch did not embitter or discourage them. Straight to the synagogue, as before, they went. It was their best introduction to the new field. There, if we take the plain words of Acts xiv. 1, they found a new thing, 'Greeks,' heathens pure and simple, not Hellenists or Greek-speaking Jews, nor even proselytes, in the synagogue. This has seemed so singular that efforts have been made to impose another sense on the words, or to suppose that the notice of Greeks, as well as Jews, believing is loosely appended to the statement of the preaching in the synagogue, omitting notice of wider evangelising. But it is better to accept than to correct our narrative, as we know nothing of the circumstances that may have led to this presence of Greeks in the synagogue. Some modern setters of the Bible writers right would be all the better for remembering occasionally that improbable things have a strange knack of happening.

The usual results followed the preaching of the Gospel. The Jews were again the mischief-makers, and, with the astuteness of their race, pushed the Gentiles to the front, and this time tried a new piece of annoyance. 'The brethren' bore the brunt of the attack; that is, the converts, not Paul and Barnabas. It was a cunning move to drop suspicions into the minds of influential townsmen, and so to harass, not the two strangers, but their adherents. The calculation was that that would stop the progress of the heresy by making its adherents uncomfortable, and would also wound the teachers through their disciples.

But one small element had been left out of the calculation—the sort of men these teachers were; and another factor which had not hitherto appeared came into play, and upset the whole scheme. Paul and

Barnabas knew when to retreat and when to stand their ground. This time they stood; and the opposition launched at their friends was the reason why they did so. 'Long time *therefore* abode they.' If their own safety had been in question, they might have fled; but they could not leave the men whose acceptance of their message had brought them into straits. But behind the two bold speakers stood 'the Lord,' Christ Himself, the true Worker. Men who live in Him are made bold by their communion with Him, and He witnesses for those who witness for Him.

Note the designation of the Gospel as 'the word of His grace.' It has for its great theme the condescending, giving love of Jesus. Its subject is grace; its origin is grace; its gift is grace. Observe, too, that the same connection between boldness of speech and signs and wonders is found in Acts iv. 29, 30. Courageous speech for Christ is ever attended by tokens of His power, and the accompanying tokens of His power make the speech more courageous.

The normal course of events was pursued. Faithful preaching provoked hostility, which led to the alliance of discordant elements, fused for a moment by a common hatred—alas! that enmity to God's truth should be often a more potent bond of union than love!—and then to a wise withdrawal from danger. Sometimes it is needful to fling away life for Jesus; but if it can be preserved without shirking duty, it is better to flee than to die. An unnecessary martyr is a suicide. The Christian readiness to be offered has nothing in common with fanatical carelessness of life, and still less with the morbid longing for martyrdom which disfigures some of the most pathetic pages of the Church's history. Paul living to preach in the regions beyond was more useful than Paul dead in a street riot in Iconium. A heroic prudence should ever accompany a trustful daring, and both are best learned in communion with Jesus.

UNWORTHY OF LIFE

'. . . Seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.'—Acts xiii. 46.

So ended the first attempt on Paul's great missionary journey to preach to the Jews. It is described at great length and the sermon given in full because it is the first. A wonderful sermon it was; touching all keys of feeling, now pleading almost with tears, now flashing with indignation, now calmly dealing with Scripture prophecies, now glowing as it tells the story of Christ's death for men. It melted some of the hearers, but the most were wrought up to furious passion—and with characteristic vehemence, like their ancestors and their descendants through long dreary generations, fell to 'contradicting and blaspheming.' We can see the scene in the synagogue, the eager faces, the vehement gestures, the hubbub of tongues, the bitter words that stormed round the two in the midst, Barnabas like Jupiter, grave, majestic, and venerable; Paul like Mercury, agile, mobile, swift of speech. They bore the brunt of the fury till they saw it to be hopeless to try to calm it, and then departed with these remarkable words.

They are even more striking if we notice that 'judge' here may be used in its full legal sense. It is not merely equivalent to *consider*, for these Jews by no means thought themselves unworthy of eternal life, but it means, 'ye adjudge and pass sentence on yourselves to be.' Their rejection of the message was a self-pronounced sentence. It proved them to be, and made them, 'unworthy of eternal life.' There are two or three very striking thoughts to be gathered from these words which I would dwell on now.

I. What constitutes worthiness and unworthiness.

There are two meanings to the word 'worthy' --deserving or fit. They run into each other and yet they may be kept quite apart. For instance you may say of a man that 'he is worthy' to be something or other, for which he is obviously qualified, not thinking at all whether he deserves it or not.

Now in the first of these senses—we are all unworthy of eternal life. That is just to state in other words the tragic truth of universal sinfulness. The natural outcome and issue of the course which all men follow is death. But yet there are men who are fit for and capable of eternal life. Who they are and what fitness is can only be ascertained when we rightly understand what eternal life is. It is not merely future blessedness or a synonym for a vulgar heaven. That is the common notion of its meaning. Men think of that future as a blessed state to which God can admit anybody if He will, and, as He is good, will admit pretty nearly everybody. But eternal life is a present possession as well as a future one, and passing by its deeper aspects, it includes—

Deliverance from evil habits and desires.

Purity, and love of all good and fair things.

Communion with God.

As well as forgiveness and removal of punishment.

What then are the qualifications making a man worthy of, in the sense of fit for, such a state?

(*a*) To know oneself to be unworthy.

He who judges himself to be worthy is unworthy. He who knows himself to be unworthy is worthy.

The first requisite is consciousness of sin, leading to repentance.

(*b*) To abandon striving to make oneself worthy.

By ourselves we never can do so. Many of us think that we must do our best, and then God will do the rest.

There must be the entire cessation of all attempt to work out by our own efforts characters that would entitle us to eternal life

(*c*) To be willing to accept life on God's terms.

As a mere gift.

(*d*) To desire it.

God cannot give it to any one who does not want it He cannot force His gifts on us.

This then is the worthiness.

II. How we pass sentence on ourselves as unworthy.

It is quite clear that 'judge' here does not mean consider, for a sense of unworthiness is not the reason which keeps men away from the Gospel. Rather, as we have seen, a proud belief in our worthiness keeps very many away. But 'judge' here means 'adjudicate' or 'pronounce sentence on,' and worthy means fit, qualified.

Consider then—

(*a*) That our attitude to the Gospel is a revelation of our deepest selves.

The Gospel is a 'discerner of thoughts and intents o the heart.' It judges us here and now, and by thei attitude to it 'the thoughts of many hearts shall b revealed.'

(*b*) That our rejection of it plainly shows that we have not the qualifications for eternal life.

No doubt some men are kept from accepting Christ by intellectual doubts and difficulties, but even these would alter their whole attitude to Him if they had a profound consciousness of sin, and a desire for deliverance from it.

But with regard to the great bulk of its hearers, no doubt the hindrance is chiefly moral. Many causes may combine to produce the absence of qualification. The excuses in the parable—farm, oxen, wife—all amount to engrossment with this present world, and such absorption in the things seen and temporal deadens desire. So the Gospel preached excites no longings, and a man hears the offer of salvation without one motion of his heart towards it, and thus proclaims himself 'unworthy of eternal life.'

But the great disqualification is the absence of all consciousness of sin. This is the very deepest reason which keeps men away from Christ.

How solemn a thing the preaching and hearing of this word is!

How possible for you to make yourselves fit!

How simple the qualification! We have but to know ourselves sinners and to trust Jesus and then we 'shall be counted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead.' Then we shall be 'worthy to escape and to stand before the Son of Man.' Then shall we be 'worthy of this calling,' and the Judge himself shall say: 'They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.'

'FULL OF THE HOLY GHOST'

And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.'—Acts xiii. 52.

That joy was as strange as a garden full of flowers would be in bitter winter weather. For everything in the circumstances of these disciples tended to make them sad. They had been but just won from heathenism, and they were raw, ignorant, unfit to stand alone. Paul and Barnabas, their only guides, had been hunted out of Antioch by a mob, and it would have been no wonder if these disciples had felt as if they had been taken on to the ice and then left, when they most needed a hand to steady them. Luke emphasises the contrast between what might have been expected, and what was actually the case, by that eloquent 'and' at the beginning of our verse, which links together the departure of the Apostles and the joy of the disciples. But the next words explain the paradox. These new converts, left in a great heathen city, with no helpers, no guides, to work out as best they might a faith of which they had but newly received the barest rudiments, were 'full of joy' because they were 'full of the Holy Ghost.'

Now that latter phrase, so striking here, is characteristic of this book of the Acts, and especially of its earlier chapters, which are all, as it were, throbbing with wonder at the new gift which Pentecost had brought. Let me for a moment, in the briefest possible fashion, try to recall to you the instances of its occurrence, for they are very significant and very important.

You remember how at Pentecost 'all' the disciples were 'filled with the Holy Ghost.' Then when the first persecution broke over the Church, Peter before the Council is 'filled with the Holy Spirit,' and therefore he beards them, and 'speaks with all boldness.' When he goes back to the Church and tells them of the threatening cloud that was hanging over them, they too are filled with the Holy Spirit, and therefore rise buoyantly upon the tossing wave, as a ship might do when it passes the bar and meets the heaving sea. Then again the Apostles lay down the qualifications for election to the so-called office of deacon as being that the men should be 'full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom'; and in accordance therewith, we read of the first of the seven, Stephen, that he was 'full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,' and therefore 'full of grace and power.' When he stood before the Council he was 'full of the Holy Ghost,' and therefore looked up into heaven and saw it opened, and the Christ standing ready to help him. In like manner we read of Barnabas that he 'was a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.' And finally we read in our text that these new converts, left alone in Antioch of Pisidia, were 'full of joy and of the Holy Ghost.'

Now these are the principal instances, and my purpose now is rather to deal with the whole of these instances of the occurrence of this remarkable expression than with the one which I have selected as a text, because I think that they teach us great truths bearing very closely on the strength and joyfulness of the Christian life which are far too much neglected, obscured, and forgotten by us to-day.

I wish then to point you, first, to the solemn thought that is here, as to what should be—

I. The experience of every Christian.

Note the two things, the universality and the abundance of this divine gift. I have often had occasion to say to you, and so I merely repeat it again in the briefest fashion, that we do not grasp the central blessedness of the Christian faith unless, beyond forgiveness and acceptance, beyond the mere putting away of the dread of punishment either here or hereafter, we see that the gift of God in Jesus Christ is the communication to every believing soul of that divine life which is bestowed by the Spirit of Christ granted to every believing heart. But I would have you notice how the universality of the gift is unmistakably taught us by the instances which I have briefly gathered together in my previous remarks. It was no official class on which, on the day of Pentecost, the tongues of fire fluttered down. It was to the whole Church that courage to front the persecutor was imparted. When in Samaria the preaching of Philip brought about the result of the communication of the Holy Spirit, it was to all the believers that it was granted, and when, in the Roman barracks at Cæsarea, Cornelius and his companion listened to Peter, it was upon them all that that Divine Spirit descended.

I suppose I need not remind you of how, if we pass beyond this book of the Acts into the Epistles of Paul, his affirmations do most emphatically insist upon the fact that 'we are all made to drink into one Spirit'; and so convinced is he of the universality of the possession of that divine life by every Christian, that he does not hesitate to say that 'if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His,' and to clear away all possibility of misunderstanding the depth and wonderfulness of the gift, he further adds in another place, 'Know ye not that the Spirit is *in* you, except ye be reprobates?' Similarly another of the New Testament writers declares, in the broadest terms, that 'this spake he of the Holy Spirit, which'—Apostles? no; office-bearers? no; ordained men? no; distinguished and leading men? No—'*they that believe on Him* should receive.' Christianity is the true democracy, because it declares that upon all, handmaidens and servants, young men and old men, there comes the divine gift. The world thinks of a divine inspiration in a more or less superficial fashion, as touching only the lofty summits, the great thinkers and teachers and artists and mighty men of light and leading of the race. The Old Testament regarded prophets and kings, and those who were designated to important offices, as the possessors of the Divine Spirit. But Christianity has seen the sun rising so high in the heavens that the humblest floweret, in the deepest valley, basks in its beams and opens to its light. 'We have *all* been made to drink into the one Spirit.'

Let me remind you too of how, from the usage of this book, as well as from the rest of the New Testament teaching, there rises the other thought of the abundance of the gift. 'Full of the Holy Spirit'—the cup is brimming with generous wine. Not that that fulness is such as to make inconsistencies impossible, as, alas, the best of us know. The highest condition for us is laid down in the sad words which yet have triumph in their sadness—'The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.' But whilst the fulness is not such as to exclude the need of conflict, it is such as to bring the certainty of victory.

Again if we turn to the instances to which I have already referred, we shall find that they fall into two classes, which are distinguished in the original by a slight variation in the form of the words employed. Some instances refer to a habitual possession of an abundant spiritual life moulding the character constantly, as in the cases of Stephen and Barnabas. Others refer rather to occasional and special influxes of special power on account of special circumstances, and drawn forth by special exigencies, as when there poured into Peter's heart the Divine Spirit that made him bold before the Council; or as when the dying martyr's spirit was flooded with a new clearness of vision that pierced the heavens and beheld the Christ. So then there may be and ought to be, in each of us, a fulness of the Spirit, up to the edge of our capacity, and yet of such a kind as that it may be reinforced and increased when special needs arise.

Not only so, but that which fills me to-day should not fill me to-morrow, because, as in earthly love, so in heavenly, no man can tell to what this thing shall grow. The more of fruition the more there will be of expansion, and the more of expansion the more of desire, and the more of desire the more of capacity, and the more of capacity the more of possession. So, brethren, the man who receives a spark of the divine life, through his most rudimentary and tremulous faith, if he is a faithful steward of the gift that is given to him, will find that it grows and grows, and that there is no limit to its growth, and that in its limitless growth there lies the surest prophecy of an eternal growth in the heavens.

A universal gift, that is to say, a gift to each of us if we are Christians, an abundant gift that fills the whole nature of a man, according to the measure of his present power to receive—that is the ideal, that is what God means, that is what these first believers had. It did not make them perfect, it did not save them from faults or from errors, but it was real, it was influential, it was moulding their characters, it was progressive. And that is the ideal for all Christians. Is it our actual? We are meant to be full of the Holy Ghost. Ah! how many of us have never realised that there is such a thing as being thus possessed with a divine life, partly because we do not understand that such a fulness will not be distinguishable from our own self, except by bettering of the works of self, and partly because of other reasons which I shall have to touch upon presently! Brethren, we may, every one of us, be filled with the Spirit. Let each of us ask, 'Am I? and if I am not, why this emptiness in the presence of such abundance?'

And now let me ask you to look, in the second place, at what we gather from these instances as to—

II. The results of that universal, abundant life.

Do not let us run away with the idea that the New Testament, or any part of it, regards miracles and tongues and the like as being the normal and chiefest gifts of that Divine Spirit. People read this book of the Acts of the Apostles and, averse from the supernatural, exaggerate the extent to which the primitive gift of the Holy Spirit was manifested by signs and wonders, tongues of fire, and so on. We have only to look at the instances to which I have already referred to see that far more lofty and far more conspicuous than any such external and transient manifestations, which yet have their place, are the permanent and inward results, moulding character, and making men. And Paul's

First Epistle to the Corinthians goes as far in the way of setting the moral and spiritual effects of the divine influence above the merely miraculous and external ones, as the most advanced opponent of the supernatural could desire.

Let us look, and it can only be briefly, at the various results which are presented in the instances to which I have referred. The most general expression for all, which is the result of the Divine Spirit dwelling in a man, is that it makes him good. Look at one of the instances to which we have referred. 'Barnabas was a good man'—was he? How came he to be so? Because he was 'full of the Holy Ghost.' And how came he to be 'full of the Holy Ghost'? Because he was 'full of faith.' Get the divine life into you, and that will make you good; and, brethren, nothing else will. It is like the bottom heat in a green-house, which makes all the plants that are there, whatever their orders, grow and blossom and be healthy and strong. Therein is the difference between Christian morality and the world's ethics. They may not differ much, they do in some respects, in their ideal of what constitutes goodness, but they differ in this, that the one says, 'Be good, be good, be good!' but, like the Pharisees of old, puts out not a finger to help a man to bear the burdens that it lays upon him. The other says, 'Be good,' but it also says, 'take this and it will make you good.' And so the one is Gospel and the other is talk, the one is a word of good tidings, and the other is a beautiful speculation, or a crushing commandment that brings death rather than life. 'If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law.' But since the clearest laying down of duty brings us no nearer to the performance of duty, we need and, thank God! we have, a gift bestowed which invests with power. He in whom the 'Spirit of Holiness' dwells, and he alone, will be holy. The result of the life of God in the heart is a life growingly like God's, manifested in the world.

Then again let me remind you of how, from another of our instances, there comes another thought. The result of this majestic, supernatural, universal, abundant, divine life is practical sagacity in the commonest affairs of life. 'Look ye out from among you seven men, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.' What to do? To meet wisely the claims of suspicious and jealous poverty, and to distribute fairly a little money. That was all. And are you going to invoke such a lofty gift as this, to do nothing grander than that? Yes. Gravitation holds planets in their orbits, and keeps grains of dust in their places. And one result of the inspiration of the Almighty, which is granted to Christian people, is that they will be wise for the little affairs of life. But Stephen was also 'full of grace and power,' two things that do not often go together—grace, gentleness, loveliness, graciousness, on the one side, and strength on the other, which divorced, make wild work of character, and which united, make men like God. So if we desire our lives to be full of sweetness and light and beauty, the best way is to get the life of Christ into them; and if we desire our lives not to be made placid and effeminate by our cult of graciousness and gracefulness, but to have their beauty stiffened and strengthened by manly energy, then the best way is to get the life of the 'strong Son of God, immortal love,' into our lives.

The same Stephen, 'full of the Holy Ghost,' looked up into heaven and saw the Christ. So one result of that abundant life, if we have it, will be that even though as with him, when he saw the heavens opened, there may be some smoke-darkened roof above our heads, we can look through all the shows of this vain world, and our purged eyes can behold the Christ. Again the disciples in our text 'were full of joy,' because 'they were full of the Holy Spirit,' and we, if we have that abundant life within us, shall not be dependent for our gladness on the outer world, but like explorers in the Arctic regions, even if we have to build a hut of snow, shall be warm within it when the thermometer is far below zero; and there will be light there when the long midnight is spread around the dwelling. So, dear friends, let us understand what is the main thing for a Christian to endeavour after, —not so much the cultivation of special graces as the deepening of the life of Christ in the spirit.

We gather from some of these instances—

III. The way by which we may be thus filled.

We read that Stephen was 'full of faith and of the Holy Spirit,' and that Barnabas was 'full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,' and it is quite clear from the respective contexts that, though the order in which these fulnesses are placed is different in the two clauses, their relation to each other is the same. Faith is the condition of possessing the Spirit. And what do we mean in this connection by faith? I mean, first, a belief in the truth of the possible abiding of the divine Spirit in our spirits, a truth which the superficial Christianity of this generation sorely needs to have forced upon its consciousness far more than it has it. I mean aspiration and desire after; I mean confident expectation of. Your wish measures your possession. You have as much of God as you desire. If you have no more, it is because you do not desire any more. The Christian people of to-day, many of whom are so empty of God, are in a very tragic sense, 'full,' because they have as much as they can take in. If you bring a tiny cup, and do not much care whether anything pours into it or not, you will get it filled, but you might have had a gallon vessel filled if you had chosen to bring it. Of course there are other conditions too. We have to use the life that is given us. We have to see that we do not quench it by sin, which drives the dove of God from a man's heart. But the great truth is that if I open the door of my heart by faith, Christ will come in, in His Spirit. If I take away the blinds the light will shine into the chamber. If I lift the sluice the water will pour in to drive my mill. If I deepen the channels, more of the water of life can flow into them, and the deeper I make them the fuller they will be.

Brethren, we have wasted much time and effort in trying to mend our characters. Let us try to get that into them which will mend them. And let us remember that, if we are full of faith, we shall be full of the Holy Spirit, and therefore full of wisdom, full of grace and power, full of goodness, full of joy, whatever our circumstances. And when death comes, though it may be in some cruel form, we shall be able to look up and see the opened heavens and the welcoming Christ.

DEIFIED AND STONED

'And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. 12. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. 13. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. 14. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, 15. And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: 16. Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. 17. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. 18. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. 19. And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. 20. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe. 21. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22. Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.'—ACTS xiv. 11-22.

THE scene at Lystra offers a striking instance of the impossibility of eliminating the miraculous element from this book. The cure of a lame man is the starting-point of the whole story. Without it the rest is motiveless and inexplicable. There can be no explosion without a train and a fuse. The miracle, and the miracle only, supplies these. We may choose between believing and disbelieving it, but the rejection of the supernatural does not make this book easier to accept, but utterly chaotic.

I. We have, first, the burst of excited wonder which floods the crowd with the conviction that the two Apostles are incarnations of deities. It is difficult to grasp the indications of locality in the story, but probably the miracle was wrought in some crowded place, perhaps the forum. At all events, it was in full view of 'the multitudes,' and they were mostly of the lower orders, as their speaking in 'the speech of Lycaonia' suggests.

This half-barbarous crowd had the ancient faith in the gods unweakened, and the legends, which had become dim to pure Greek and Roman, some of which had originated in their immediate neighbourhood, still found full credence among them. A Jew's first thought on seeing a miracle was, 'by the prince of the devils'; an average Greek's or Roman's was 'sorcery'; these simple people's, like many barbarous tribes to which white men have gone with the marvels of modern science, was 'the gods have come down'; our modern superior person's, on reading of one, is 'hallucination,' or 'a mistake of an excited imagination.' Perhaps the cry of the multitudes at Lystra gets nearer the heart of the thing than those others. For the miracle is a witness of present divine power, and though the worker of it is not an incarnation of divinity, 'God *is* with him.'

But that joyful conviction, which shot through the crowd, reveals how deep lies the longing for the manifestation of divinity in the form of humanity, and how natural it is to believe that, if there is a divine being, he is sure to draw near to us poor men, and that in our own likeness. Then is the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation but one more of the many reachings out of the heart to paint a fair picture of the fulfilment of its longings? Well, since it is the only such that is alleged to have taken place in historic times, and the only one that comes with any body of historic evidence, and the only one that brings with it transforming power, and since to believe in a God, and also to believe that He has never broken the awful silence, nor done anything to fulfil a craving which He has set in men's hearts, is absurd, it is reasonable to answer, No. 'The gods are come down in the likeness of men' is a wistful confession of need, and a dim hope of its supply. 'The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us' is the supply.

Barnabas was the older man, and his very silence suggested his superior dignity. So he was taken for

Jupiter (Zeus in the Greek), and the younger man for his inferior, Mercury (Hermes in the Greek), 'the messenger of the gods.' Clearly the two missionaries did not understand what the multitudes were shouting in their 'barbarous' language, or they would have intervened. Perhaps they had left the spot before the excitement rose to its height, for they knew nothing of the preparations for the sacrifice till they '*heard* of' it, and then they 'sprang forth,' which implies that they were within some place, possibly their lodging.

If we could be sure what 'gates' are meant in verse 13, the course of events would be plainer. Were they those of the city, in which case the priest and procession would be coming from the temple outside the walls? or those of the temple itself? or those of the Apostles' lodging? Opinions differ, and the material for deciding is lacking. At all events, whether from sharing in the crowd's enthusiasm, or with an eye to the reputation of his shrine, the priest hurriedly procured oxen for a sacrifice, which one reading of the text specifies as an 'additional' offering—that is, over and above the statutory sacrifices. Is it a sign of haste that the 'garlands,' which should have been twined round the oxen's horns, are mentioned separately? If so, we get a lively picture of the exultant hurry of the crowd.

II. The Apostles are as deeply moved as the multitude is, but by what different emotions! The horror of idolatry, which was their inheritance from a hundred generations, flamed up at the thought of themselves being made objects of worship. They had met many different sorts of receptions on this journey, but never before anything like this. Opposition and threats left them calm, but this stirred them to the depths. 'Scoff at us, fight with us, maltreat us, and we will endure; but do not make gods of us.' I do not know that their 'successors' have always felt exactly so.

In verse 14 Barnabas is named first, contrary to the order prevailing since Paphos, the reason being that the crowd thought him the superior. The remonstrance ascribed to both, but no doubt spoken by Paul, contains nothing that any earnest monotheist, Jew or Gentile philosopher, might not have said. The purpose of it was not to preach Christ, but to stop the sacrifice. It is simply a vehemently earnest protest against idolatry, and a proclamation of one living God. The comparison with the speech in Athens is interesting, as showing Paul's exquisite felicity in adapting his style to his audience. There is nothing to the peasants of Lycaonia about poets, no argumentation about the degradation of the idea of divinity by taking images as its likeness, no wide view of the course of history, no glimpse of the mystic thought that all creatures live and move in Him. All that might suit the delicate ears of Athenians, but would have been wasted in Lystra amidst the tumultuous crowd. But we have instead of these the fearless assertion, flung in the face of the priest of Jupiter, that idols are 'vanities,' as Paul had learned from Isaiah and Jeremiah; the plain declaration of the one God, 'living,' and not like these inanimate images; of His universal creative power; and the earnest exhortation to turn to Him.

In verse 16 Paul meets an objection which rises in his mind as likely to be springing in his hearers': 'If there is such a God, why have we never heard of Him till now?' That is quite in Paul's manner. The answer is undeveloped, as compared with the Athenian address or with Romans i. But there is couched in verse 16 a tacit contrast between 'the generations gone by' and the present, which is drawn out in the speech on Mars Hill: 'but *now* commandeth all men everywhere to repent,' and also a contrast between the 'nations' left to walk in their own ways, and Israel to whom revelation had been made. The place and the temper of the listeners did not admit of enlarging on such matters.

But there was a plain fact, which was level to every peasant's apprehension, and might strike home to the rustic crowd. God *had* left 'the nations to walk in their own ways,' and yet not altogether. That thought is wrought out in Romans i., and the difference between its development there and here is instructive. Benencence is the sign-manual of heaven. The orderly sequence of the seasons, the rain from heaven, the seat of the gods from which the two Apostles were thought to have come down, the yearly miracle of harvest, and the gladness that it brings—all these are witnesses to a living Person moving the processes of the universe towards a beneficent end for man.

In spite of all modern impugners, it still remains true that the phenomena of 'nature,' their continuity, their co-operation, and their beneficent issues, demand the recognition of a Person with a loving purpose moving them all. '*Thou* crownest the year with Thy goodness; and *Thy* paths drop fatness.'

III. The malice of the Jews of Antioch is remarkable. Not content with hounding the Apostles from that city, they came raging after them to Lystra, where there does not appear to have been a synagogue, since we hear only of their stirring up the 'multitudes.' The mantle of Saul had fallen on them, and they were now 'persecuting' *him* 'even unto strange cities.'

No note is given of the time between the attempted sacrifice and the accomplished stoning, but probably some space intervened. Persuading the multitudes, however fickle they were, would take some time; and indeed one ancient text of Acts has an expansion of the verse: 'They persuaded the multitudes to depart from them [the Apostles], saying that they spake nothing true, but lied in everything.'

No doubt some time elapsed, but few emotions are more transient than such impure religious excitement as the crowd had felt, and the ebb is as great as the flood, and the oozy bottom laid bare is foul. Popular favourites in other departments have to experience the same fate—one day, 'roses, roses, all the way'; the next, rotten eggs and curses. Other folks than the ignorant peasants at Lystra have had devout emotion surging over them and leaving them dry.

Who are 'they' who stoned Paul? Grammatically the Jews, and probably it was so. They hated him so much that they themselves began the stoning; but no doubt the mob, which is always cruel, because it needs strong excitement, lent willing hands. Did Paul remember Stephen, as the stones came whizzing on him? It is an added touch of brutality that they dragged the supposed corpse out of the city, with no gentle hands, we may be sure. Perhaps it was flung down near the very temple 'before the city,' where the priest that wanted to sacrifice was on duty.

The crowd, having wreaked their vengeance, melted away, but a handful of brave disciples remained, standing round the bruised, unconscious form, ready to lay it tenderly in some hastily dug grave. No previous mention of disciples has been made. The narrative of Acts does not profess to be complete, and the argument from its silence is precarious.

Luke shows no disposition to easy belief in miracles. He does not know that Paul was dead; his medical skill familiarised him with protracted states of unconsciousness; so all he vouches for is that Paul lay as it dead on some rubbish heap 'without the camp,' and that, with courage and persistence which were supernatural, whether his reviving was so or not, the man thus sorely battered went back to the city, and next day went on with his work, as if stoning was a trifle not to be taken account of.

The Apostles turned at Derbe, and coming back on their outward route, reached Antioch, encouraging the new disciples, who had now to be left truly like shepherdless sheep among wolves. They did not encourage them by making light of the dangers waiting them, but they plainly set before them the law of the Kingdom, which they had seen exemplified in Paul, that we must suffer if we would reign with the King. That 'we' in verse 22 is evidently quoted from Paul, and touchingly shows how he pointed to his own stoning as what they too must be prepared to suffer. It is a thought frequently recurring in his letters. It remains true in all ages, though the manner of suffering varies.

DREAM AND REALITY

'The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.'—ACTS xiv. 11.

THIS was the spontaneous instinctive utterance of simple villagers when they saw a deed of power and kindness. Many an English traveller and settler among rude people has been similarly honoured. And in Lycaonia the Apostles were close upon places that were celebrated in Greek mythology as having witnessed the very two gods, here spoken of, wandering among the shepherds and entertained with modest hospitality in their huts.

The incident is a very striking and picturesque one. The shepherd people standing round, the sudden flash of awe and yet of gladness which ran through them, the tumultuous outcry, which, being in their rude dialect, was unintelligible to the Apostles till it was interpreted by the appearance of the priest of Jupiter with oxen and garlands for offerings, the glimpse of the two Apostles—the older, graver, venerable Barnabas, the younger, more active, ready-tongued Paul, whom their imaginations converted into the Father of gods and men, and the herald Mercury, who were already associated in local legends; the priest, eager to gain credit for his temple 'before the city,' the lowing oxen, and the vehement appeal of the Apostles, make a picture which is more vividly presented in the simple narrative than even in the cartoon of the great painter whom the narrative has inspired.

But we have not to deal with the picturesque element alone. The narratives of Scripture are representative because they are so penetrating and true. They go to the very heart of the men and things which they describe: and hence the words and acts which they record are found to contain the essential characteristics of whole classes of men, and the portrait of an individual becomes that of a class. This joyful outburst of the people of Lycaonia gives utterance to one of the most striking and universal convictions of heathenism, and stands in very close and intimate relations with that greatest of all facts in the history of the world, the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. That the gods come down in the likeness of men is the dream of heathenism. 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,' is the sober, waking truth which meets and vindicates and transcends that cry.

I. The heathen dream of incarnation.

In all lands we find this belief in the appearance of the gods in human form. It inspired the art and poetry of Greece. Rome believed that gods had charged in front of their armies and given their laws. The solemn, gloomy religion of Egypt, though it worshipped animal forms, yet told of incarnate and suffering gods. The labyrinthine mythologies of the East have their long-drawn stories of the avatars of their gods floating many a rood on the weltering ocean of their legends. Tibet cherishes each living sovereign as a real embodiment of the divine. And the lowest tribes, in their degraded worship, have not departed so far from the common type but that they too have some faint echoes of the universal faith.

Do these facts import anything at all to us? Are we to dismiss them as simply the products of a stage which we have left far behind, and to plume ourselves that we have passed out of the twilight?

Even if we listen to what comparative mythology has to say, it still remains to account for the tendency to shape legends of the earthly appearance of the gods; and we shall have to admit that, while they belong to an early stage of the world's progress, the feelings which they express belong to all stages of it.

Now I think we may note these thoughts as contained in this universal belief:

The consciousness of the need of divine help.

The certainty of a fellowship between heaven and earth.

The high ideal of the capacities and affinities of man.

We may note further what were the general characteristics of these incarnations. They were transient, they were 'docetic,' as they are called—that is, they were merely apparent assumptions of human form which brought the god into no nearer or truer kindred with humanity, and they were, for the most part, for very self-regarding and often most immoral ends, the god's personal gratification of very ungodlike passions and lust, or his winning victories for his favourites, or satisfying his anger by trampling on those who had incurred his very human wrath.

II. The divine answer which transcends the human dream.

We have to insist that the truth of the Incarnation is the corner-stone of Christianity. If that is struck out the whole fabric falls. Without it there may be a Christ who is the loftiest and greatest of men, but not the Christ who 'saves His people from their sins.

That being so, and Christianity having this feature in common with all the religions of men, how are we to account for the resemblance? Are we to listen to the rude solution which says, 'All lies alike'? Are we to see in it nothing but the operation of like tendencies, or rather illusions, of human thought—man's own shadow projected on an illuminated mist? Are we to let the resemblance discredit the Christian message? Or are we to say that all these others are unconscious prophecies—man's half-instinctive expression of his deep need and much misunderstood longing, and that the Christian proclamation that Jesus is 'God manifest in the flesh' is the trumpet-toned announcement of Heaven's answer to earth's cry?

Fairly to face that question is to go far towards answering it. For as soon as we begin to look steadily at the facts, we find that the differences between all these other appearances and the Incarnation are so great as to raise the presumption that their origins are different. The 'gods' slipped on the appearance of humanity over their garment of deity in appearance only, and that for a moment. Jesus is 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh,' and is not merely 'found in fashion as a man,' but is 'in all points like as we are.' And that garb of manhood He wears for ever, and in His heavenly glory is 'the Man Christ Jesus.'

But *the* difference between all these other appearances of gods and the Incarnation lies in the acts to which they and it respectively led, and the purposes for which they and it respectively took place. A god who came down to suffer, a god who came to die, a god who came to be the supreme example of all fair humanities, a god who came to suffer and to die that men might have life and be victors over sin—where is he in all the religions of the world? And does not the fact that Christianity alone sets before men such a God, such an Incarnation, for such ends, make the assertion a reasonable one, that the sources of the universal belief in gods who come down among men and of the Christian proclamation that the Eternal Word became flesh are not the same, but that these are men's half-understood cries, and this is Heaven's answer?

'THE DOOR OF FAITH'

'And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.'—Acts xiv. 27.

THERE are many instances of the occurrence of this metaphor in the New Testament, but none is exactly like this. We read, for example, of 'a great door and effectual' being opened to Paul for the free ministry of the word; and to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia, 'He that openeth and none shall shut' graciously says, 'I have set before thee a door opened, which none can shut.' But here the door is faith, that is to say faith is conceived of as the means of entrance for the Gentiles into the Kingdom, which, till then, Jews had supposed to be entered by hereditary rite.

I. Faith is the means of our entrance into the Kingdom.

The Jew thought that birth and the rite of circumcision were the door, but the 'rehearsing' of the experiences of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary tour shattered that notion by the logic of facts. Instead of that narrow postern another doorway had been broken in the wall of the heavenly city, and it was wide enough to admit of multitudes entering. Gentiles had plainly come in. How had they come in? By believing in Jesus. Whatever became of previous exclusive theories, there was a fact that had to be taken into account. It distinctly proved that faith was 'the gate of the Lord into which,' not the circumcised but the 'righteous,' who were righteous because believing, 'should enter.'

We must not forget the other use of the metaphor, by our Lord Himself, in which He declares that He is the Door. The two representations are varying but entirely harmonious, for the one refers to the objective fact of Christ's work as making it possible that we should draw near to and dwell with God, and the other to our subjective appropriation of that possibility, and making it a reality in our own blessed experience.

II. Faith is the means of God's entrance into our hearts.

We possess the mysterious and awful power of shutting God out of these hearts. And faith, which in one aspect is our means of entrance into the Kingdom of God, is, in another, the means of God's entrance into us. The Psalm, which invokes the divine presence in the Temple, calls on the 'everlasting doors' to be 'lifted up,' and promises that then 'the King of Glory will come in.' And the voice of the ascended Christ, the King of Glory, knocking at the closed door, calls on us with our own hands to open the door, and promises that He 'will come in.'

Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith,' and there is no other way by which His indwelling is possible. Faith is not constituted the condition of that divine indwelling by any arbitrary appointment, as a sovereign might determine that he would enter a city by a certain route, chosen without any special reason from amongst many, but in the nature of things it is necessary that trust, and love which follows trust, and longing which follows love should be active in a soul if Christ is to enter in and abide there.

III. Faith is the means of the entrance of the Kingdom into us.

If Christ comes in He comes with His pierced hands full of gifts. Through our faith we receive all spiritual blessings. But we must ever remember, what this metaphor most forcibly sets forth, that faith is but the means of entrance. It has no worth in itself, but is precious only because it admits the true wealth. The door is nothing. It is only an opening. Faith is the pipe that brings the water, the flinging wide the shutters that the light may flood the dark room, the putting oneself into the path of the electric circuit. Salvation is not arbitrarily connected with faith. It is not the reward of faith but the possession of what comes through faith, and cannot come in any other way. Our 'hearts' are 'purified by faith,' because faith admits into our hearts the life, and instals as dominant in them the powers, the motives, the Spirit, which purify. We are 'saved by faith,' for faith brings into our spirits the Christ who saves His people from their sins, when He abides in them and they abide in Him through their faith.

THE BREAKING OUT OF DISCORD

'And certain men which came down from Judæa taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. 5. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. 6. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.'—ACTS xv. 1-6.

THE question as to the conditions on which Gentiles could be received into Christian communion had already been raised by the case of Cornelius, but it became more acute after Paul's missionary journey. The struggle between the narrower and broader views was bound to come to a head. Traces of the cleft between Palestinian and Hellenist believers had appeared as far back as the 'murmuring' about the unfair neglect of the Hellenist widows in the distribution of relief, and the whole drift of things since had been to widen the gap.

Whether the 'certain men' had a mission to the Church in Antioch or not, they had no mandate to lay down the law as they did. Luke delicately suggests this by saying that they 'came down from Judæa,' rather than from Jerusalem. We should be fair to these men, and remember how much they had to say in defence of their position. They did not question that Gentiles could be received into the Church, but 'kept on teaching' (as the word in the Greek implies) that the divinely appointed ordinance of circumcision was the 'door' of entrance. God had prescribed it, and through all the centuries since Moses, all who came into the fold of Israel had gone in by that gate. Where was the commandment to set it aside? Was not Paul teaching men to climb up some other way, and so blasphemously abrogating a divine law?

No wonder that honest believers in Jesus as Messiah shrank with horror from such a revolutionary procedure. The fact that they were Palestinian Jews, who had never had their exclusiveness rubbed off, as Hellenists like Paul and Barnabas had had, explains, and to some extent excuses, their position. And yet their contention struck a fatal blow at the faith, little as they meant it. Paul saw what they did not see—that if anything else than faith was brought in as necessary to knit men to Christ, and make them partakers of salvation, faith was deposed from its place, and Christianity sank back to be a religion of 'works.' Experience has proved that anything whatever introduced as associated with faith ejects faith from its place, and comes to be recognised as *the* means of salvation. It must be faith *or* circumcision, it cannot be faith *and* circumcision. The lesson is needed to-day as much as in Antioch. The controversy started then is a perennial one, and the Church of the present needs Paul's exhortation, 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.'

The obvious course of appealing to Jerusalem was taken, and it is noteworthy that in verse 2 the verb 'appointed' has no specified subject. Plainly, however, it was the Church which acted, and so natural did that seem to Luke that he felt it unnecessary to say so. No doubt Paul concurred, but the suggestion is not said to have come from him. He and Barnabas might have asserted their authority, and declined to submit what they had done by the Spirit's guidance to the decision of the Apostles, but they seek the things that make for peace.

No doubt the other side was represented in the deputation. Jerusalem was the centre of unity, and remained so till its fall. The Apostles and elders were the recognised leaders of the Church. Elders here appear as holding a position of authority; the only previous mention of them is in Acts xi. 30, where they receive the alms sent from Antioch. It is significant that we do not hear of their first appointment. The organisation of the Church took shape as exigencies prescribed.

The deputation left Antioch, escorted lovingly for a little way by the Church, and, journeying by land, gladdened the groups of believers in 'Phenicia and Samaria' with the news that the Gentiles were turning to God. We note that they are not said to have spoken of the thorny question in these countries, and that it is not said that there was joy in Judæa. Perhaps the Christians in it were in sympathy with the narrower view.

The first step taken in Jerusalem was to call a meeting of the Church to welcome the deputation. It is significant that the latter did not broach the question in debate, but told the story of the success of their mission. That was the best argument for receiving Gentile converts without circumcision. God had received them; should not the Church do so? Facts are stronger than theories. It was Peter's argument in the case of Cornelius: they 'have received the Holy Ghost as well as we,' 'who was I, that I could withstand God?' It is the argument which shatters all analogous narrowing of the conditions of Christian life. If men say, 'Except ye be' this or that 'ye cannot be saved,' it is enough to point to the fruits of Christian character, and say, 'These show that the souls which bring them forth *are* saved, and you must widen your conceptions of the possibilities to include these actualities.' It is vain to say 'Ye cannot be' when manifestly they are.

But the logic of facts does not convince obstinate theorists, and so the Judaising party persisted in their 'It is needful to circumcise them.' None are so blind as those to whom religion is mainly a matter of ritual. You may display the fairest graces of Christian character before them, and you get no answer but the reiteration of 'It is needful to circumcise you.' But on their own ground, in Jerusalem, the spokesmen of that party enlarged their demands. In Antioch they had insisted on circumcision, in Jerusalem they added the demand for entire conformity to the Mosaic law. They were quite logical; their principle demanded that extension of the requirement, and was thereby condemned as utterly unworkable. Now that the whole battery was unmasked the issue was clear—Is Christianity to be a Jewish sect or the universal religion? Clear as it was, few in that assembly saw it. But the parting of the ways had been reached.

THE CHARTER OF GENTILE LIBERTY

'Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. 13. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: 14. Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. 15. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16. After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17. That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. 18. Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world. 19. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20. But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach Him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. 22. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23. And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: 24. Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: 25. It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26. Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.'—ACTS xv. 12-29.

MUCH was at stake in the decision of this gathering of the Church. If the Jewish party triumphed, Christianity sank to the level of a Jewish sect. The question brought up for decision was difficult, and there was much to be said for the view that the Mosaic law was binding on Gentile converts. It must have been an uprooting of deepest beliefs for a Jewish Christian to contemplate the abrogation of that law, venerable by its divine origin, by its hoary antiquity, by its national associations. We must not be hard upon men who clung to it; but we should learn from their final complete drifting away from Christianity how perilous is the position which insists on the necessity to true discipleship of any outward observance.

Our passage begins in the middle of the conference. Peter has, with characteristic vehemence, dwelt upon the divine attestation of the genuine equality of the uncircumcised converts with the Jewish, given by their possession of the same divine Spirit, and has flung fiery questions at the Judaisers, which silenced them. Then, after the impressive hush following his eager words, Barnabas and Paul tell their story once more, and clinch the nail driven by Peter by asserting that God had already by 'signs and wonders' given His sanction to the admission of Gentiles without circumcision. Characteristically, in Jerusalem Barnabas is restored to his place above Paul, and is named first as speaking first, and regarded by the Jerusalem Church as the superior of the missionary pair.

The next speaker is James, not an Apostle, but the bishop of the Church in Jerusalem, of whom tradition tells that he was a zealous adherent to the Mosaic law in his own person, and that his knees were as hard as a camel's through continual prayer. It is singular that this meeting should be so often called 'the Apostolic council,' when, as a fact, only one Apostle said a word, and he not as an Apostle, but as the chosen instrument to preach to the Gentiles. 'The elders,' of whose existence we now hear for the first time in this wholly incidental manner, were associated with the Apostles (ver. 6), and the 'multitude' (ver. 12) is most naturally taken to be 'the whole Church' (ver. 22). James represents the eldership, and as bishop in Jerusalem and an eager observer of legal prescriptions, fittingly speaks. His words practically determined the question. Like a wise man, he begins with facts. His use of the intensely Jewish form of the name Simeon is an interesting reminiscence of old days. So he had been accustomed to call Peter when they were all young together, and so he calls him still, though everybody else named him by his new name. What God had done by him seems to James to settle the whole question; for it was nothing else than to put the Gentile converts without circumcision on an equality with the Jewish part of the Church.

Note the significant juxtaposition of the words 'Gentiles' and 'people'—the former the name for heathen, the latter the sacred designation of the chosen nation. The great paradox which, through Peter's preaching at Cæsarea, had become a fact was that the 'people of God' were made up of Gentiles as well as Jews—that His name was equally imparted to both. If God had made Gentiles His people, had He not thereby shown that the special observances of Israel were put aside, and that, in particular, circumcision was no longer the condition of entrance? The end of national distinction and the opening of a new way of incorporation among the people of God were clearly contained in the facts. How much Christian narrowness would be blown to atoms if its advocates would do as James did, and let God's facts teach them the width of

God's purposes and the comprehensiveness of Christ's Church! We do wisely when we square our theories with facts; but many of us go to work in the opposite way, and snip down facts to the dimension of our theories.

James's next step is marked equally by calm wisdom and open-mindedness. He looks to God's word, as interpreted by God's deeds, to throw light in turn on the deeds and to confirm the interpretation of these. Two things are to be noted in considering his quotation from Amos—its bearing on the question in hand, and its divergence from the existing Hebrew text. As to the former, there seems at first sight nothing relevant to James's purpose in the quotation, which simply declares that the Gentiles will seek the Lord when the fallen tabernacle of David is rebuilt. That period of time has at least begun, thinks James, in the work of Jesus, in whom the decayed dominion of David is again in higher form established. The return of the Gentiles does not merely synchronise with, but is the intended issue of, Christ's reign. Lifted from the earth, He will draw all men unto Him, and they shall 'seek the Lord,' and on them His name will be called.

Now the force of this quotation lies, as it seems, first in the fact that Peter's experience at Cæsarea is to be taken as an indication of how God means the prophecy to be fulfilled, namely, without circumcision; and secondly, in the *argumentum a silentio*, since the prophet says nothing about ritual or the like, but declares that moral and spiritual qualifications—on the one hand a true desire after God, and on the other receiving the proclamation of His name and calling themselves by it—are all that are needed to make Gentiles God's people. Just because there is nothing in the prophecy about observing Jewish ceremonies, and something about longing and faith, James thinks that these are the essentials, and that the others may be dropped by the Church, as God had dropped them in the case of Cornelius, and as Amos had dropped them in his vision of the future kingdom. God knew what He meant to do when He spoke through the prophet, and what He has done has explained the words, as James says in verse 18.

The variation from the Hebrew text requires a word of comment. The quotation is substantially from the Septuagint, with a slight alteration. Probably James quoted the version familiar to many of his hearers. It seems to have been made from a somewhat different Hebrew text in verse 17, but the difference is very much slighter than an English reader would suppose. Our text has 'Edom' where the Septuagint has 'men'; but the Hebrew words without vowels are identical but for the addition of one letter in the former. Our text has 'inherit' where the Septuagint has 'seek after'; but there again the difference in the two Hebrew words would be one letter only, so that there may well have been a various reading as preserved in the Septuagint and Acts. James adds to the Septuagint 'seek' the evidently correct completion 'the Lord.'

Now it is obvious that, even if we suppose his rendering of the whole verse to be a paraphrase of the same Hebrew text as we have, it is a correct representation of the meaning; for the 'inheriting of Edom' is no mere external victory, and Edom is always in the Old Testament the type of the godless man. The conquest of the Gentiles by the restorer of David's tabernacle is really the seeking after the Lord, and the calling of His name upon the Gentiles.

The conclusion drawn by James is full of practical wisdom, and would have saved the Church from many a sad page in its history, if its spirit had been prevalent in later 'councils.' Note how the very designation given to the Gentile converts in verse 19 carries argumentative force. 'They turn to God from among the Gentiles'—if they have done that, surely their new separation and new attachment are enough, and make insistence on circumcision infinitely ridiculous. They have the thing signified; what does it matter about the sign, which is good for us Jews, but needless for them? If Church rulers had always been as open-eyed as this bishop in Jerusalem, and had been content if people were joined to God and parted from the world, what torrents of blood, what frowning walls of division, what scandals and partings of brethren would have been spared!

The observances suggested are a portion of the precepts enjoined by Judaism on proselytes. The two former were necessary to the Christian life; the two latter were not, but were concessions to the Jewish feelings of the stricter party. The conclusion may be called a compromise, but it was one dictated by the desire for unity, and had nothing unworthy in it. There should be giving and taking on both sides. If the Jewish Christians made the, to them, immense concession of waiving the necessity of circumcision, the Gentile section might surely make the small one of abstinence from things strangled and from blood. Similarities in diet would daily assimilate the lives of the two parties, and would be a more visible and continuous token of their oneness than the single act of circumcision.

But what does the reason in verse 21 mean? Why should the reading of Moses every Sabbath be a reason for these concessions? Various answers are given: but the most natural is that the constant promulgation of the law made respect for the feelings (even if mistaken) of Jewish Christians advisable, and the course suggested the most likely to win Jews who were not yet Christians. Both classes would be flung farther apart if there were not some yielding. The general principle involved is that one cannot be too tender with old and deeply rooted convictions even if they be prejudices, and that Christian charity, which is truest wisdom, will consent to limitations of Christian liberty, if thereby any little one who believes in Him shall be saved from being offended, or any unbeliever from being repelled.

The letter embodying James's wise suggestion needs little further notice. We may observe that there was no imposing and authoritative decision of the Ecclesia, but that the whole thing was threshed out in free talk, and then the unanimous judgment of the community, 'Apostles, elders and the whole Church,' was embodied in the epistle. Observe the accurate rendering of verse 25 (R.V.), 'having *come* to one accord,' which gives a lively picture of the process. Note too that James's proposal of a letter was mended by the addition of a deputation, consisting of an unknown 'Judas called Barsabas' (perhaps a relative of 'Joseph called Barsabas,' the unsuccessful nominee for Apostleship in chap. i.), and the well-known Silas or Silvanus, of whom we hear so much in Paul's letters. That journey was the turning-point in his life, and he henceforward, attracted by the mass and magnetism of Paul's great personality, revolved round him, and forsook Jerusalem.

Probably James drew up the document, which has the same somewhat unusual 'greeting' as his Epistle.

The sharp reference to the Judaising teachers would be difficult for their sympathisers to swallow, but charity is not broken by plain repudiation of error and its teachers. 'Subverting your souls' is a heavy charge. The word is only here found in the New Testament, and means to unsettle, the image in it being that of packing up baggage for removal. The disavowal of these men is more complete if we follow the Revised Version in reading (ver. 24) 'no commandment' instead of 'no such commandment.'

These unauthorised teachers 'went'; but, in strong contrast with them, Judas and Silas are chosen out and sent. Another thrust at the Judaising teachers is in the affectionate eulogy of Paul and Barnabas as 'beloved,' whatever disparaging things had been said about them, and as having 'hazarded their lives,' while these others had taken very good care of themselves, and had only gone to disturb converts whom Paul and Barnabas had won at the peril of their lives.

The calm matter-of-course assertion that the decision which commended itself to 'us' is the decision of 'the Holy Ghost' was warranted by Christ's promises, and came from the consciousness that they had observed the conditions which He had laid down. They had brought their minds to bear upon the question, with the light of facts and of Scripture, and had come to a unanimous conclusion. If they believed their Lord's parting words, they could not doubt that His Spirit had guided them. If we lived more fully in that Spirit, we should know more of the same peaceful assurance, which is far removed from the delusion of our own infallibility, and is the simple expression of trust in the veracious promises of our Lord.

The closing words of the letter are beautifully brotherly, sinking authority, and putting in the foreground the advantage to the Gentile converts of compliance with the injunctions. 'Ye shall do well,' rightly and conformably with the requirements of brotherly love to weaker brethren. And thus doing well, they will 'fare well,' and be strong. That is not the way in which 'lords over God's heritage' are accustomed to end their decrees. Brotherly affection, rather than authority imposing its will, breathes here. Would that all succeeding 'Councils' had imitated this as well as 'it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us'!

A GOOD MAN'S FAULTS

'And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. 38. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.'—ACTS xv. 37, 38.

SCRIPTURE narratives are remarkable for the frankness with which they tell the faults of the best men. It has nothing in common with the cynical spirit in historians, of which this age has seen eminent examples, which fastens upon the weak places in the noblest natures, like a wasp on bruises in the ripest fruit, and delights in showing how all goodness is imperfect, that it may suggest that none is genuine. Nor has it anything in common with that dreary melancholy which also has its representatives among us, that sees everywhere only failures and fragments of men, and has no hope of ever attaining anything beyond the common average of excellence. But Scripture frankly confesses that all its noblest characters have fallen short of unstained purity, and with boldness of hope as great as its frankness teaches the weakest to aspire, and the most sinful to expect perfect likeness to a perfect

Lord. It is a plane mirror, giving back all images without distortion.

We recall how emphatically and absolutely it eulogised Barnabas as 'a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith'—and now we have to notice how this man, thus full of the seminal principle of all goodness, derived into his soul by deep and constant communion through faith, and showing in his life practical righteousness and holiness, yet goes sadly astray, tarnishes his character, and mars his whole future.

The two specific faults recorded of him are his over-indulgence in the case of Mark, and his want of firmness in opposition to the Judaising teachers who came down to Antioch. They were neither of them grave faults, but they were real. In the one he was too facile in overlooking a defect which showed unfitness for the work, and seems to have yielded to family affection and to have sacrificed the efficiency of a mission to it. Not only was he wrong in proposing to condone Mark's desertion, but he was still more wrong in his reception of the opposition to his proposal. With the firmness which weak characters so often display at the wrong time, he was resolved, come what would, to have his own way. Temper rather than principle made him obstinate where he should have been yielding, as it had made him in Antioch yielding, where he should have been firm. Paul's remonstrances have no effect. He will rather have his own way than the companionship of his old friend, and so there come alienation and separation. The Church at Antioch takes Paul's view—all the brethren are unanimous in disapproval. But Barnabas will not move. He sets up his own feeling in opposition to them all. The sympathy of his brethren, the work of his life, the extension of Christ's kingdom are all tossed aside. His own foolish purpose is more to him in that moment of irritation than all these. So he snaps the tie, abandons his work, and goes away without a kindly word, without a blessing, without the Church's prayers—but with his nephew for whom he had given up all these. Paul sails away to do God's work, and the Church 'recommends him to the grace of God,' but Barnabas steals away home to Cyprus, and his name is no more heard in the story of the planting of the kingdom of Christ.

One hopes that his work did not stop thus, but his recorded work does, and in the band of friends who surrounded the great Apostle, the name of his earliest friend appears no more. Other companions and associates in labour take his place; he, as it appears, is gone for ever. One reference (1 Cor. ix. 6) at a later date seems most naturally to suggest that he still continued in the work of an evangelist, and still practised the principle to which he and Paul had adhered when together, of supporting himself by manual labour. The tone of the reference implies that there were relations of mutual respect. But the most we can believe is that probably the two men still thought kindly of each other and honoured each other for their work's sake, but found it better to labour apart, and not to seek to renew the old companionship which had been so violently torn asunder.

The other instance of weakness was in some respects of a still graver kind. The cause of it was the old controversy about the obligations of Jewish law on Gentile Christians. Paul, Peter, and Barnabas all concurred in neglecting the restrictions imposed by Judaism, and in living on terms of equality and association in eating and drinking with the heathen converts at Antioch. A principle was involved, to which Barnabas had been the first to give in his adhesion, in the frank recognition of the Antioch Church. But as soon as emissaries from the other party came down, Peter and he abandoned their association with Gentile converts, not changing their convictions but suppressing the action to which their convictions should have led. They pretended to be of the same mind with these narrow Jews from Jerusalem. They insulted their brethren, they deserted Paul, they belied their convictions, they imperilled the cause of Christian liberty, they flew in the face of what Peter had said that God Himself had showed him, they did their utmost to degrade Christianity into a form of Judaism—all for the sake of keeping on good terms with the narrow bigotry of these Judaising teachers.

Now if we take these two facts together, and set them side by side with the eulogy pronounced on Barnabas as 'a good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith,' we have brought before us in a striking form some important considerations.

I. The imperfect goodness of good men.

A good man does not mean a faultless man. Of course the power which works on a believing soul is always tending to produce goodness and only goodness. But its operation is not such that we are always equally, uniformly, perfectly under its influence. Power in germ is one thing, in actual operation another. There may be but a little ragged patch of green in the garden, and yet it may be on its way to become a flower-bed. A king may not have established dominion over all his land. The actual operation of that transforming Spirit at any given moment is limited, and we can withdraw ourselves from it. It does not begin by leavening all our nature

So we have to note—

The root of goodness.

The main direction of a life.

The progressive character of goodness.

The highest style of Christian life is a struggle. So we draw practical inferences as to the conduct of life.

This thought of imperfection does not diminish the criminality of individual acts.

It does not weaken aspiration and effort towards higher life.

It does alleviate our doubts and fears when we find evil in ourselves.

II. The possible evil lurking in our best qualities.

In Barnabas, his amiability and openness of nature, the very characteristics that had made him strong, now make him weak and wrong.

How clearly then there is brought out here the danger that lurks even in our good! I need not remind you how every virtue may be run to an extreme and become a vice. Liberality is exaggerated into prodigality; firmness, into obstinacy; mercy, into weakness; gravity, into severity; tolerance, into feeble conviction; humility, into abjectness.

And these extremes are reached when these graces are developed at the expense of the symmetry of the character.

We are not simple but complex, and what we need to aim at is a character, not an excrescence. Some people's goodness is like a wart or a wen. Their virtues are cases of what medical technicality calls hypertrophy. But our goodness should be like harmonious Indian patterns, where all colours blend in a balanced whole.

Such considerations enforce the necessity for rigid self-control And that in two directions.

(*a*) Beware of your excellences, your strong points.

(*b*) Cultivate sedulously the virtues to which you are not inclined.

The special form of error into which Barnabas fell is worth notice. It was over-indulgence, tolerance of evil in a person; feebleness of grasp, a deficiency of boldness in carrying out his witness to a disputed truth. In this day liberality, catholicity, are pushed so far that there is danger of our losing the firmness of our grasp of principles, and indulgence for faults goes so far that we are apt to lose the habit of unsparing, though unangry, condemnation of unworthy characters. This generation is like Barnabas; very quick in sympathy, generous in action, ready to recognise goodness where-ever it is beheld. But Barnabas may be a beacon, warning us of the possible evils that dog these excellences like their shadows.

III. The grave issues of small faults.

Comparatively trivial as was Barnabas's error, it seems to have wrecked his life, at least to have marred it for long years, and to have broken his sweet companionship with Paul. I think we may go further and say, that most good men are in more danger from trivial faults than from great ones. No man reaches the superlative degree of wickedness all at once. Few men spring from the height to the abyss, they usually slip down. The erosive action of the sand of the desert is said to be gradually cutting off the Sphinx's head. The small faults are most numerous. We are least on our guard against them. There is a microscopic weed that chokes canals. Snow-flakes make the sky as dark as an eclipse does. White ants eat a carcase quicker than a lion does.

So we urge the necessity for bringing ordinary deeds and small actions to be ruled and guided by God's Spirit.

How the contemplation of the imperfection, which is the law of life, should lead us to hope for that heaven where perfection is.

How the contemplation of the limits of all human goodness should lead us to exclusive faith in, and imitation of, the one perfect Lord. He stands stainless among the stained. In Him alone is no sin, from Him alone like goodness may be ours.

HOW TO SECURE A PROSPEROUS VOYAGE

'And after [Paul] had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. 11. Therefore . . . we came with a straight course.'—ACTS xvi. 10, 11.

THIS book of the Acts is careful to point out how each fresh step in the extension of the Church's work was directed and commanded by Jesus Christ Himself. Thus Philip was sent by specific injunction to 'join himself' to the chariot of the Ethiopian statesman. Thus Peter on the house-top at Joppa, looking out over the waters of the western sea, had the vision of the great sheet, knit at the four corners. And thus Paul, in singularly similar circumstances, in the little seaport of Troas, looking out over the narrower sea which there separates Asia from Europe, had the vision of the man of Macedonia, with his cry, 'Come over and help *us*!' The whole narrative before us bears upon the one point, that Christ Himself directs the expansion of His kingdom. And there never was a more fateful moment than that at which the Gospel, in the person of the Apostle, crossed the sea, and effected a lodgment in the progressive quarter of the world.

Now what I wish to do is to note how Paul and his little company behaved themselves when they had received Christ's commandment. For I think there are lessons worth the gathering to be found there. There was no doubt about the vision; the question was what it meant. So note three stages. First, careful consideration, with one's own common sense, of what God wants us to do—'Assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us.' Then, let no grass grow under our feet—immediate obedience—'Straightway we endeavoured to go into Macedonia.' And then, patient pondering and instantaneous submission get the reward—'We came with a straight course.' He gave the winds and the waves charge concerning them. Now there are three lessons for us. Taken together, they are patterns of what ought to be in our experience, and will be, if the conditions are complied with.

I. First, Careful Consideration.

Paul had no doubt that what he saw was a vision from Christ, and not a mere dream of the night, born of the reverberation of waking thoughts and anxieties, that took the shape of the plaintive cry of the man of Macedonia. But then the next step was to be quite sure of what the vision meant. And so, wisely, he does not make up his mind himself, but calls in the three men who were with him. And what a significant little group it was! There were Timothy, Silas, and Luke—Silas, from Jerusalem; Timothy, half a Gentile; Luke, altogether a Gentile; and Paul himself—and these four shook the world. They come together, and they talk the matter over. The word of my text rendered 'assuredly gathering' is a picturesque one. It literally means 'laying things together.' They set various facts side by side, or as we say in our colloquial idiom, 'They put this and that together,' and so they came to understand what the vision meant.

What had they to help them to understand it? Well, they had this fact, that in all the former part of their journey they had been met by hindrances; that their path had been hedged up here, there, and everywhere. Paul set out from Antioch, meaning a quiet little tour of visitation amongst the churches that had been already established. Jesus Christ meant Philippi and Athens and Corinth and Ephesus, before Paul got back again. So we read in an earlier portion of the chapter that the Spirit of Jesus forbade them to speak the Word in one region, and checked and hindered them when, baffled, they tried to go to another. There then remained only one other road open to them, and that led to the coast. Thus putting together their hindrances and their stimuluses, they came to the conclusion that unitedly the two said plainly, 'Go across the sea, and preach the word there.'

Now it is a very commonplace and homely piece of teaching to remind you that time is not wasted in making quite sure of the meaning of providences which seem to declare the will of God, before we begin to act. But the commonest duties are very often neglected; and we preachers, I think, would very often do more good by hammering at commonplace themes than by bringing out original and fresh ones. And so I venture to say a word about the immense importance to Christian life and Christian service of this preliminary step—'assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us.' What have we to do in order to be quite sure of God's intention for us?

Well, the first thing seems to me to make quite sure that we want to know it, and that we do not want to force our intentions upon Him, and then to plume ourselves upon being obedient to His call, when we are only doing what we like. There is a vast deal of unconscious insincerity in us all; and especially in regard to Christian work there is an enormous amount of it. People will say, 'Oh, I have such a strong impulse in a given direction, to do certain kinds of Christian service, that I am quite sure that it is God's will.' How are you sure? A strong impulse may be a temptation from the devil as well as a call from God. And men who simply act on untested impulses, even the most benevolent which spring directly from large Christian principles, may be making deplorable mistakes. It is not enough to have pure motives. It is useless to say, 'Such and such a course of action is clearly the result of the truths of the Gospel.' That may be all perfectly true, and yet the course may not be the course for you. For there may be practical considerations, which do not come into our view unless we carefully think about them, which forbid us to take such a path. So remember that strong impulses are not guiding lights; nor is it enough to vindicate our pursuing some mode of Christian service that it is in accordance with the principles of the Gospel. 'Circumstances alter cases' is a very homely old saying; but if Christian people would only bring the common sense to bear upon their religious life which they need to bring to bear upon their business life, unless they are going into the *Gazette*, there would be less waste work in the Christian Church than there is to-day. I do not want less zeal; I want that the reins of the fiery steed shall be kept well in hand. The difference between a fanatic, who is a fool, and an enthusiast, who is a wise man, is that the one brings calm reason to bear, and an open-eyed consideration of circumstances all round; and the other sees but one thing at a time, and shuts his eyes, like a bull in a field, and charges at that. So let us be sure, to begin with, that we want to know what God wants us to do; and that we are not palming our wishes upon Him, and calling them His providences.

Then there is another plain, practical consideration that comes out of this story, and that is, Do not be above being taught by failures and hindrances. You know the old proverb, 'It is waste time to flog a dead horse' There is not a little well-meant work flung away, because it is expended on obviously hopeless efforts to revivify, perhaps, some moribund thing or to continue, perhaps, in some old, well-worn rut, instead of striking out into a new path. Paul was full of enthusiasm for the evangelisation of Asia Minor, and he might have said a great deal about the importance of going to Ephesus. He tried to do it, but Christ said 'No,' and Paul did not knock his head against the stone wall that lay between him and the accomplishment of his purpose, but he gave it up and tried another tack. He next wished to go up into Bithynia, and he might have said a great deal about the needs of the people by the Euxine; but again down came the barrier, and he had once more to learn the lesson, 'Not as thou wilt, but as I will.' He was not above being taught by his failures. Some of us are; and it is very difficult, and needs a great deal of Christian wisdom and unselfishness, to distinguish between hindrances in the way of work which are meant to evoke larger efforts, and hindrances which are meant to say, 'Try another path, and do not waste time here any longer.'

But if we wish supremely to know God's will, He will help us to distinguish between these two kinds of difficulties. Some one has said, 'Difficulties are things to be overcome.' Yes, but not always. They very often are, and we should thank God for them then; but they sometimes are God's warnings to us to go by another road. So we need discretion, and patience, and suspense of judgment to be brought to bear upon all our purposes and plans.

Then, of course, I need not remind you that the way to get light is to seek it in the Book and in communion with Him whom the Book reveals to us as the true Word of God: 'He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' So careful consideration is a preliminary to all good Christian work. And, if you can, talk to some Timothy and Silas and Luke about your course, and do not be above taking a brother's advice.

II. The next step is Immediate Submission.

When they had assuredly gathered that the Lord had called them, 'immediately'—there is great virtue in that one word—'we endeavoured to go into Macedonia.' Delayed obedience is the brother—and, if I may mingle metaphors, sometimes the father—of disobedience. It sometimes means simple feebleness of conviction, indolence, and a general lack of fervour. It means very often a reluctance to do the duty that lies plainly before us. And, dear brethren, as I have said about the former lesson, so I say about this. The homely virtue, which we all know to be indispensable to success in common daily life and commercial undertakings, is no less indispensable to all vigour of Christian life and to all nobleness of Christian service. We have no hours to waste; the time is short. In the harvest-field, especially when it is getting near the end of the week, and the Sunday is at hand, there are little leisure and little tolerance of slow workers. And for us the fields are white, the labourers are few, the Lord of the harvest is imperative, the sun is hurrying to the west, and the sickles will have to be laid down before long. So, '*immediately* we endeavoured.'

Delayed duty is present discomfort. As long as a man has a conscience, so long will he be restless and uneasy until he has, as the Quakers say, 'cleared himself of his burden,' and done what he knows that he ought to do, and got done with it. Delayed obedience means wasted possibilities of service, and so is ever to be avoided. The more disagreeable anything is which is plainly a duty, the more reason there is for doing it right away. 'I made haste, and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.'

Did you ever count how many '*straightways*' there are in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel? If you have not, will you do it when you go home; and notice how they come in? In the story of Christ's opening ministry every fresh incident is tacked on to the one before it, in that chapter, by that same word 'straightway.' 'Straightway' He does that; 'anon' He does this; 'immediately' He does the other thing. All is one continuous stream of acts of service. The Gospel of Mark is the Gospel of the servant, and it sets forth the pattern to which all Christian service ought to be conformed.

So if we take Jesus Christ for our Example, unhasting and unresting in the work of the Lord, we shall let no moment pass burdened with undischarged duty; and we shall find that all the moments are few enough for the discharge of the duties incumbent upon us.

III. So, lastly, careful consideration and unhesitating obedience lead to a Straight Course.

Well, it is not so always, but it is so generally. There is a wonderful power in diligent doing of God's known will to smooth away difficulties and avoid troubles. I do not, of course, mean that a man who thus lives, patiently ascertaining and then promptly doing what God would have him do, has any miraculous exemption from the ordinary sorrows and trials of life. But sure I am that a very, very large proportion of all the hindrances and disappointments, storms and quicksands, calms which prevent progress and headwinds that beat in our faces, are directly the products of our negligence in one or other of these two respects, and that although by no means absolutely, yet to an extent that we should not believe if we had not the experience of it, the wish to do God's will and the doing of it with our might when we know what it is have a talismanic power in calming the seas and bringing us to the desired haven.

But though this is not always absolutely true in regard of outward things, it is, without exception or limitation, true in regard of the inward life. For if my supreme will is to do God's will then nothing which is His will, and comes to me because it is can be a hindrance in my doing that.

As an old proverb says, 'Travelling merchants can never be out of their road.' And a Christian man whose path is simple obedience to the will of God can never be turned from that path by whatever hindrances may affect his outward life. So, in deepest truth, there is always a calm voyage for the men whose eyes are open to discern, and whose hands are swift to fulfil, the commandments of their Father in heaven. For them all winds blow them to their port; for them 'all things work together for good'; with them God's servants who hearken to the voice of His commandments, and are His ministers to do His pleasure, can never be other than in amity and alliance. He who is God's servant is the world's master. 'All things are yours if ye are Christ's.'

So, brethren, careful study of providences and visions, of hindrances and stimulus, careful setting of our lives side by side with the Master's, and a swift delight in doing the will of the Lord, will secure for us, in inmost truth, a prosperous voyage, till all storms are hushed, 'and they are glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them to their desired haven.'

PAUL AT PHILIPPI

'And on the sabbath day we went forth without the gate, by a river side, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which were come together.'—ACTS xvi. 13 (R.V.).

THIS is the first record of the preaching of the Gospel in Europe, and probably the first instance of it. The fact that the vision of the man of Macedonia was needed in order to draw the Apostle across the straits into Macedonia, and the great length at which the incidents at Philippi are recorded, make this probable. If so, we are here standing, as it were, at the well-head of a mighty river, and the thin stream of water assumes importance when we remember the thousand miles of its course, and the league-broad estuary in which it pours itself into the ocean. Here is the beginning;

the Europe of to-day is what came out of it. There is no sign whatever that the Apostle was conscious of an epoch in this transference of the sphere of his operations, but we can scarcely help being conscious of such.

And so, looking at the words of my text, and seeing here how unobtrusively there stole into the progressive part of the world the power which was to shatter and remould all its institutions, to guide and inform the onward march of its peoples, to be the basis of their liberties, and the starting-point of their literature, we can scarcely avoid drawing lessons of importance.

The first point which I would suggest, as picturesquely enforced for us by this incident, is—

I. The apparent insignificance and real greatness of Christian work.

There did not seem in the whole of that great city that morning a more completely insignificant knot of people than the little weather-beaten Jew, travel-stained, of weak bodily presence, and of contemptible speech, with the handful of his attendants, who slipped out in the early morning and wended their way to the quiet little oratory, beneath the blue sky, by the side of the rushing stream, and there talked informally and familiarly to the handful of women. The great men of Philippi would have stared if any one had said to them, 'You will be forgotten, but two of these women will have their names embalmed in the memory of the world for ever. Everybody will know Euodia and Syntyche. Your city will be forgotten, although a battle that settled the fate of the civilised world was fought outside your gates. But that little Jew and the letter that he will write to that handful of believers that are to be gathered by his preaching will last for ever.' The mightiest thing done in Europe that morning was when the Apostle sat down by the riverside, 'and spake to the women which resorted thither.'

The very same vulgar mistake as to what is great and as to what is small is being repeated over and over again; and we are all tempted to it by that which is worldly and vulgar in ourselves, to the enormous detriment of the best part of our natures. So it is worth while to stop for a moment and ask what is the criterion of greatness in our deeds? I answer, three things—their motive, their sphere, their consequences. What is done for God is always great. You take a pebble and drop it into a brook, and immediately the dull colouring upon it flashes up into beauty when the sunlight strikes through the ripples, and the magnitude of the little stone is enlarged. If I may make use of such a violent expression, drop your deeds into God, and they will all be great, however small they are. Keep them apart from Him, and they will be small, though all the drums of the world beat in celebration, and all the vulgar people on the earth extol their magnitude. This altar magnifies and sanctifies the giver and the gift. The great things are the things that are done for God.

A deed is great according to its sphere. What bears on and is confined to material things is smaller than what affects the understanding. The teacher is more than the man who promotes material good. And on the very same principle, above both the one and the other, is the doer of deeds which touch the diviner part of a man's nature, his will, his conscience, his affections, his relations to God. Thus the deeds that impinge upon these are the highest and the greatest; and far above the scientific inventor, and far above the mere teacher, as I believe, and as I hope you believe, stands the humblest work of the poorest Christian who seeks to draw any other soul into the light and liberty which he himself possesses. The greatest thing in the world is charity, and the purest charity in the world is that which helps a man to possess the basis and mother-tincture of all love, the love towards God who has first loved us, in the person and the work of His dear Son.

That which being done has consequences that roll through souls, 'and grow for ever and for ever,' is a greater work than the deed whose issues are more short-lived. And so the man who speaks a word which may deflect a soul into the paths which have no end until they are swallowed up in the light of the God who 'is a Sun,' is a worker whose work is truly great. Brethren, it concerns the nobleness of the life of us Christian people far more closely than we sometimes suppose, that we should purge our souls from the false estimate of magnitudes which prevails so extensively in the world's judgment of men and their doings. And though it is no worthy motive for a man to seek to live so that he may do great things, it is a part of the discipline of the Christian mind, as well as heart, that we should be able to reduce the swollen bladders to their true flaccidity and insignificance, and that we should understand that things done for God, things done on men's souls, things done with consequences which time will not exhaust, nor eternity put a period to, are, after all, the great things of human life.

Ah, there will be a wonderful reversal of judgments one day! Names that now fill the trumpet of fame will fall silent. Pages that now are read as if they were leaves of the 'Book of Life' will be obliterated and unknown, and when all the flashing cressets in Vanity

Fair have smoked and stunk themselves out, 'They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.' The great things are the Christian things, and there was no greater deed done that day, on this round earth, than when that Jewish wayfarer, travel-stained and insignificant, sat himself down in the place of prayer, and 'spake unto the women which resorted thither.' Do not be over-cowed by the loud talk of the world, but understand that Christian work is the mightiest work that a man can do.

Let us take from this incident a hint as to—

II. The law of growth in Christ's Kingdom.

Here, as I have said, is the thin thread of water at the source. We to-day are on the broad bosom of the expanded stream. Here is the little beginning; the world that we see around us has come from this, and there is a great deal more to be done yet before all the power that was transported into Europe, on that Sabbath morning, has wrought its legitimate effects. That is to say, 'the Kingdom of God cometh not by observation.' Let me say a word, and only a word, based on this incident, about the law of small beginnings and the law of slow, inconspicuous development.

We have here an instance of the law of small, silent beginnings. Let us go back to the highest example of everything that is good; the life of Jesus Christ. A cradle at Bethlehem, a carpenter's shop in Nazareth, thirty years buried in a village, two or three years, at most, going up and down quietly in a remote nook of the earth, and then He passed away silently and the world did not know Him. 'He shall not strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets.' And as the Christ so His Church, and so His Gospel, and so all good movements that begin from Him. Destructive preparations may be noisy; they generally are. Constructive beginnings are silent and small. If a thing is launched with a great beating of drums and blowing of trumpets, you may be pretty sure there is very little in it. Drums are hollow, or they would not make such a noise. Trumpets only catch and give forth wind. They say—I know not whether it is true—that the *Wellingtonia gigantea*, the greatest of forest trees, has a smaller seed than any of its congeners. It may be so, at any rate it does for an illustration. The germ-cell is always microscopic. A little beginning is a prophecy of a great ending.

In like manner there is another large principle suggested here which, in these days of impatient haste and rushing to and fro, and religious as well as secular advertising and standing at street corners, we are very apt to forget, but which we need to remember, and that is that the rate of growth is swift when the duration of existence is short. A reed springs up in a night. How long does an oak take before it gets too high for a sheep to crop at? The moth lives its full life in a day. There is no creature that has helpless infancy so long as a man. We have the slow work of mining; the dynamite will be put into the hole one day, and the spark applied—and then? So 'an inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed.'

Let us apply that to our own personal life and work, and to the growth of Christianity in the world, and let us not be staggered because either are so slow. 'The Lord is not slack concerning His promises, as some men count slackness. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.'

How long will that day be of which a thousand years are but as the morning twilight? Brethren, you have need of patience. You Christian workers, and I hope I am speaking to a great many such now; how long does it take before we can say that we are making any impression at all on the vast masses of evil and sin that are round about us? God waited, nobody knows how many millenniums and more than millenniums, before He had the world ready for man. He waited for more years than we can tell before He had the world ready for the Incarnation. His march is very slow because it is ever onwards. Let us be thankful if we forge ahead the least little bit; and let us not be impatient for swift results which are the fool's paradise, and which the man who knows that he is working towards God's own end can well afford to do without.

And now, lastly, let me ask you to notice, still further as drawn from this incident—

III. The simplicity of the forces to which God entrusts the growth of His Kingdom.

It is almost ludicrous to think, if it were not pathetic and sublime, of the disproportion between the end that was aimed at and the way that was taken to reach it, which the text opens before us. 'We went out to the riverside, and we spake unto the women which resorted thither.' That was all. Think of Europe as it was at that time. There was Greece over the hills, there was Rome ubiquitous and ready to exchange its contemptuous toleration for active hostility. There was the unknown barbarism of the vague lands beyond. Think of the established idolatries which these men had to meet, around which had gathered, by the superstitious awe of untold ages, everything that was obstinate, everything that was menacing, everything that was venerable. Think of the subtleties to which they had to oppose their unlettered message. Think of the moral corruption that was eating like an ulcer into the very heart of society. Did ever a Cortez on the beach, with his ships in flames behind him, and a continent in arms before, cast himself on a more desperate venture? And they conquered! How? What were the small stones from the brook that slew Goliath? Have we got them? Here they are, the message that they spoke, the white heat of earnestness with which they spoke it, and the divine Helper who backed them up. And we have this message. Brethren, that old word, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,' is as much needed, as potent, as truly adapted to the complicated civilisation of this generation, as surely reaching the deepest wants of the human soul, as it was in the days when first the message poured, like a red-hot lava flood, from the utterances of Paul. Like lava it has gone cold to-day, and stiff in many places, and all the heat is out of it. That is the fault of the speaker, never of the message. It is as mighty as ever it was, and if the Christian Church would keep more closely to it, and would realise more fully that the Cross does not need to be propped up so much as to be proclaimed, I think we should see that it is so. That sword has not lost its temper, and modern modes of warfare have not antiquated it. As David said to the high priests at Nob, when he was told that Goliath's sword was hid behind the ephod, 'Give me that. There is none like it.' It was not miracles, it was the Gospel that was preached, which was 'the power of God unto salvation.'

And that message was preached with earnestness

There is one point in which every successful servant of Jesus Christ who has done work for Him, winning men to Him, has been like every other successful servant, and there is only one point. Some of them have been wise men, some of them have been foolish. Some of them have been clad with many puerile notions and much rubbish of ceremonial and sacerdotal theories. Some of them have been high Calvinists, some of them low Arminians; some of them have been scholars, some of them could hardly read. But they have all had this one thing: they believed with all their hearts what they spake. They fulfilled the Horatian principle, 'If you wish me to weep, your own eyes must overflow'—and if you wish me to believe, you must speak, not 'with bated breath and whispering humbleness,' but as if you yourself believed it, and were dead set on getting other people to believe it, too.

And then the third thing that Paul had we have, and that is the presence of the Christ. Note what it says in the context about one convert who was made that morning, Lydia, 'whose heart the Lord opened.' Now I am not going to deduce Calvinism or any other 'ism' from these words, but I pray you to note that there is emerging on the surface here what runs all through this book of Acts, and animates the whole of it, viz., that Jesus Christ Himself is working, doing all the work that is done through His servants. Wherever there are men aflame with that with which every Christian man and woman should be aflame, the consciousness of the preciousness of their Master, and their own responsibility for the spreading of His Name, there, depend upon it, will be the Christ to aid them. The picture with which one of the Evangelists closes his Gospel will be repeated: 'They went everywhere preaching the word, the Lord also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.'

Dear brethren, the vision of the man of Macedonia which drew Paul across the water from Troas to Philippi speaks to us. 'Come over and help us,' comes from many voices. And if we, in however humble and obscure, and as the foolish purblind world calls it, 'small,' way, yield to the invitation, and try to do what in us lies, then we shall find that, like Paul by the riverside in that oratory, we are building better than we know, and planting a little seed, the springing whereof God will bless. 'Thou sowest not that which shall be, but bare grain . . . and God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.'

THE RIOT AT PHILIPPI

> 'And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, 20. And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, 21. And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. 22. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. 23. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely: 24. Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. 25. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. 26. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. 27. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. 29. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.'—ACTS xvi. 19-34.

This incident gives us the Apostle's first experience of purely Gentile opposition. The whole scene has a different stamp from that of former antagonisms, and reminds us that we have passed into Europe. The accusers and the grounds of accusation are new. Formerly Jews had led the attack; now Gentiles do so. Crimes against religion were charged before; now crimes against law and order. Hence the narrative is more extended, in accordance with the prevailing habit of the book, to dilate on the first of a series and to summarise subsequent members of it. We may note the unfounded charge and unjust sentence; the joyful confessors and the answer to their trust; the great light that shone on the jailer's darkness.

I. This was a rough beginning of the work undertaken at the call of Christ. Less courageous and faithful men might have thought, 'Were we right in "assuredly gathering" that His hand pointed us hither, since this is the reception we find?' But though the wind meets us as soon as we clear the harbour, the salt spray dashing in our faces is no sign that we should not have left shelter. A difficult beginning often means a prosperous course; and hardships are not tokens of having made a mistake.

The root of the first antagonism to the Gospel in Europe was purely mercenary. The pythoness's masters had no horror of Paul's doctrines. They were animated by no zeal for Apollo. They only saw a source of profit drying up. Infinitely more respectable was Jewish opposition, which was, at all events, the perverted working of noble sentiments. Zeal for religion, even when the zeal is impure and the notions of religion imperfect, is higher than mere anger at pecuniary loss. How much of the opposition since and to-day comes from the same mean source! Lust and appetite organise profitable trades, in which 'the money has no smell,' however foul the cesspool from which it has been brought. And when Christian people set themselves against these abominations, capital takes the command of the mob of drink-sellers and consumers, or of those from haunts of fleshly sin, and shrieks about interfering with honest industry, and seeking to enforce sour-faced Puritanism on society. The Church may be very sure that it is failing in some part of its duty, if there is no class of those who fatten on providing for sin howling at its heels, because it is interfering with the hope of their gains.

The charge against the little group took no heed of the real character of their message. It artfully put prominent their nationality. These early anti-Semitic agitators knew the value of a good solid prejudice, and of a nickname. 'Jews'—that was enough. The rioters were 'Romans'—of a sort, no doubt, but it was poor pride for a Macedonian to plume himself on having lost his nationality. The great crime laid to Paul's charge was —troubling the city. So it always is. Whether it be George Fox, or John Wesley, or the Salvation Army, the disorderly elements of every community attack the preachers of the Gospel in the name of order, and break the peace in their eagerness to have it kept. There was no 'trouble' in Philippi, but the uproar which they themselves were making. The quiet praying-place by the riverside, and the silencing of the maiden's shout in the streets, were not exactly the signs of disturbers of civic tranquillity.

The accuracy of the charge may be measured by the ignorance of the accusers that Paul and his friends were in any way different from the run of Jews. No doubt they were supposed to be teaching Jewish practices, which were supposed to be inconsistent with Roman citizenship. But if the magistrates had said, 'What customs?' the charge would have collapsed. Thank God, the Gospel has a witness to bear against many 'customs'; but it does not begin by attacking even these, much less by prescribing illegalities. Its errand was and is to the individual first. It sets the inner man right with God, and then the new life works itself out, and will war against evils which the old life deemed good; but the conception of Christianity as a code regulating actions is superficial, whether it is held by friends or foes.

There is always a mob ready to follow any leader, especially if there is the prospect of hurting somebody. The lovers of tranquillity showed how they loved it by dragging Paul and Silas into the forum, and bellowing untrue charges against them. The mob seconded them; 'they rose up together [with the slave-owners] against Paul and Silas.' The magistrates, knowing the ticklish material that they had to deal with, and seeing only a couple of Jews from nobody knew where, did not think it worth while to inquire or remonstrate. They were either cowed or indifferent; and so, to show how zealous they and the mob were for Roman law, they drove a coach-and-six clean through it, and without the show of investigation, scourged and threw into prison the silent Apostles. It was a specimen of what has happened too often since. How many saints have been martyred to keep popular feeling in good tune! And how many politicians will strain conscience to-day, because they are afraid of what Luke here unpolitely calls 'the multitude,' or as we might render it, 'the mob,' but which we now fit with a much more respectful appellation!

The jailer, on his part, in the true spirit of small officials, was ready to better his instructions. It is dangerous to give vague directions to such people. When the judge has ordered unlawful scourging, the turnkey is not likely to interpret the requirement of safe keeping too leniently. One would not look for much human kindness in a Philippian jail. So it was natural that the deepest, darkest, most foul-smelling den should be chosen for the two, and that they should be thrust, bleeding backs and all, into the stocks, to sleep if they could.

II. These birds could sing in a darkened cage. The jailer's treatment of them after his conversion shows what he had neglected to do at first. They had no food; their bloody backs were unsponged; they were thrust into a filthy hole, and put in a posture of torture. No wonder that they could not sleep! But what hindered sleep would, with most men, have sorely dimmed trust and checked praise. Not so with them. God gave them 'songs in the night.' We can hear the strains through all the centuries, and they bid us be cheerful and trustful, whatever befalls. Surely Christian faith never is more noble than when it triumphs over circumstances, and brings praises from lips which, if sense had its way, would wail and groan. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world.' The true anæsthetic is trust in God. No wonder that the baser sort of prisoners—and base enough they probably were—'were listening to them,' for such sounds had never been heard there before. In how many a prison have they been heard since!

We are not told that the Apostles prayed for deliverance. Such deliverance had not been always granted. Peter indeed had been set free, but Stephen and James had been martyred, and these two heroes had no ground to expect a miracle to free them. But thankful trust is always an appeal to God. And it is always answered, whether by deliverance from or support in trial.

This time deliverance came. The tremor of the earth was the token of God's answer. It does not seem likely that an earthquake could loosen fetters in a jail full of prisoners, but more probably the opening of the doors and the falling off of the chains were due to a separate act of divine power, the earthquake being but the audible token thereof. At all events, here again, the first of a series has distinguishing features, and may stand as type of all its successors. God will never leave trusting hearts to the fury of enemies. He sometimes will stretch out a hand and set them free, He sometimes will leave them to bear the utmost that the world can do, but He will always hear their cry and save them. Paul had learned the lesson which Philippi was meant to teach, when he said, though anticipating a speedy death by martyrdom, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me into His heavenly Kingdom.'

III. The jailer behaves as such a man in his position would do. He apparently slept in a place that commanded a view of the doors; and he lay dressed, with his sword beside him, in case of riot or attempted escape. His first impulse on awaking is to look at the gates. They are open; then some of his charge have broken them. His immediate thought of suicide not only shows the savage severity of punishment which he knew would fall on him, but tells a dreary tale of the desperate sense of the worthlessness of life and blank ignorance of anything beyond which then infected the Roman world. Suicide, the refuge of cowards or of pessimists, sometimes becomes epidemic. Faith must have died and hope vanished before a man can say, 'I will take the leap into the dark.'

Paul's words freed the man from one fear, but woke a less selfish and profounder awe. What did all this succession of strange things mean? Here are doors open; how came that? Here are prisoners with the possibility of escape refusing it; how came that? Here is one of his victims tenderly careful of his life and peacefulness, and taking the upper hand of him; how came that? A nameless awe begins to creep over him; and when he gets lights, and sees the two whom he had made fast in the stocks standing there free, and yet not caring to go forth, his rough nature is broken down. He recognises his superiors. He remembers the pythoness's testimony, that they told 'the way of salvation.'

His question seems 'psychologically impossible' to critics, who have probably never asked it themselves. Wonderful results follow from the judicious use of that imposing word 'psychologically'; but while we are not to suppose that this man knew all that 'salvation' meant, there is no improbability in his asking such a question, if due regard is paid to the whole preceding events, beginning with the maiden's words, and including the impression of Paul's personality and the mysterious freeing of the prisoners.

His dread was the natural fear that springs when a man is brought face to face with God; and his question, vague and ignorant as it was, is the cry of the dim consciousness that lies dormant in all men—the consciousness of needing deliverance and healing. It erred in supposing that he had to 'do' anything; but it was absolutely right in supposing that he needed salvation, and that Paul could tell him how to get it. How many of us, knowing far more than he, have never asked the same wise question, or have never gone to Paul for an answer? It is a question which we should all ask; for we all need salvation, which is deliverance from danger and healing for soul-sickness.

Paul's answer is blessedly short and clear. Its brevity and decisive plainness are the glory of the Gospel. It crystallises into a short sentence the essential directory for all men.

See how little it takes to secure salvation. But see how much it takes; for the hardest thing of all is to be content to accept it as a gift, 'without money and without price.' Many people have listened to sermons all their lives, and still have no clear understanding of the way of salvation. Alas that so often the divine simplicity and brevity of Paul's answer are darkened by a multitude of irrelevant words and explanations which explain nothing!

The passage ends with the blessing which we may all receive. Of course the career begun then had to be continued by repeated acts of faith, and by growing knowledge and obedience. The incipient salvation is very incomplete, but very real. There is no reason to doubt that, for some characters, the only way of becoming Christians is to become so by one dead-lift of resolution. Some things are best done slowly; some things best quickly. One swift blow makes a cleaner fracture than filing or sawing. The light comes into some lives like sunshine in northern latitudes, with long dawn and slowly growing brightness; but in some the sun leaps into the sky in a moment, as in the tropics. What matter how long it takes to rise, if it does rise, and climb to the zenith?

THE GREAT QUESTION AND THE PLAIN ANSWER

'He brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'—ACTS xvi. 30, 31.

THE keeper of a Macedonian jail was not likely to be a very nervous or susceptible person. And so the extraordinary state of agitation and panic into which this rough jailer was cast needs some kind of explanation. There had been, as you will all remember, an earthquake of a strange kind, for it not only opened the prison doors, but shook the prisoner's chains off. The doors being opened, there was on the part of the jailer, who probably ought not to have been asleep, a very natural fear that his charge had escaped.

So he was ready, with that sad willingness for suicide which marked his age, to cast himself on his sword, when Paul encouraged him.

That fear then was past; what was he afraid of now? He knew the prisoners were all safe; why should he have come pale and trembling? Perhaps we shall find an answer to the question in another one. Why should he have gone to Paul and Silas, his two prisoners, for an anodyne to his fears?

The answer to that may possibly be found in remembering that for many days before this a singular thing had happened. Up and down the streets of Philippi a woman possessed with 'a spirit of divination' had gone at the heels of these two men, proclaiming in such a way as to disturb them: 'These are the servants of the Most High God, which show unto us the way of salvation.' It was a new word and a new idea in Philippi or in Macedonia. This jailer had got it into his mind that these two men had in their hands a good which he only dimly understood. The panic caused by the earthquake deepened into a consciousness of some supernatural atmosphere about him, and stirred in his rude nature unwonted aspirations and terrors other than he had known, which cast him at Paul's feet with this strange question.

Now do you think that the jailer's question was a piece of foolish superstition? I daresay some of you do, or some of you may suppose too that it was one very unnecessary for him or anybody to ask. So I wish now, in a very few words, to deal with these three points—the question that we should all ask, the answer that we may all take, the blessing that we may all have.

I. The question that we should all ask.

I know that it is very unfashionable nowadays to talk about 'salvation' as man's need. The word has come to be so worn and commonplace and technical that many men turn away from it; but for all that, let me try to stir up the consciousness of the deep necessity that it expresses.

What is it to be saved? Two things; to be healed and to be safe. In both aspects the expression is employed over and over again in Scripture. It means either restoration from sickness or deliverance from peril. I venture to press upon every one of my hearers these two considerations—we all need healing from sickness; we all need safety from peril.

Dear brethren, most of you are entire strangers to me; I daresay many of you never heard my voice before, and probably may never hear it again. But yet, because 'we have all of us one human heart,' a brother-man comes to you as possessing with you one common experience, and ventures to say on the strength of his knowledge of himself, if on no other ground, 'We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.'

Mind, I am not speaking about vices. I have no doubt you are a perfectly respectable man, in all the ordinary relations of life. I am not speaking about crimes. I daresay there may be a man or two here that has been in a dock in his day. Possibly. It does not matter whether there is or not. But I am not speaking about either vices or crimes; I am speaking about how we stand in reference to God. And I pray you to bring yourselves—for no one can do it for you, and no words of mine can do anything but stimulate you to the act—face to face with the absolute and dazzlingly pure righteousness of your Father in Heaven, and to feel the contrast between your life and what you know He desires you to be. Be honest with yourselves in asking and answering the question whether or not *you* have this sickness of sin, its paralysis in regard to good or its fevered inclination to evil. If salvation means being healed of a disease, we all have the disease; and whether we wish it or no, we want the healing.

And what of the other meaning of the word? Salvation means being safe. Are you safe? Am I safe? Is anybody safe standing in front of that awful law that rules the whole universe, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap'? I am not going to talk about any of the moot points which this generation has such a delight in discussing, as to the nature, the duration, the purpose, or the like, of future retribution. All that I am concerned in now is that all men, deep down in the bottom of their consciousness—and you and I amongst the rest—know that there *is* such a thing as retribution here; and if there be a life beyond the grave at all, necessarily in an infinitely intenser fashion there. Somewhere and somehow, men will have to lie on the beds that they have made; to drink as they have brewed. If sin means separation from God, and separation from God means, as it assuredly does, death, then I ask you—and there is no need for any exaggerated words about it—Are we not in danger? And if salvation be a state of deliverance from sickness, and a state of deliverance from peril, do we not need it?

Ah, brethren, I venture to say that we need it more than anything else. You will not misunderstand me as expressing the slightest depreciation of other remedies that are being extensively offered now for the various evils under which society and individuals groan. I heartily sympathise with them all, and would do my part to help them forward; but I cannot but feel that whilst culture of the intellect, of the taste, of the sense of beauty, of the refining agencies generally, is very valuable; and whilst moral and social and economical and political changes will all do something, and some of them a great deal, to diminish the sum of human misery, you have to go deeper down than these reach. It is not culture that we want most; it is salvation. Brethren, you and I are wrong in our relation to God, and that means death and—if you do not shrink from the vulgar old word—damnation. We are wrong in our relation to God, and that has to be set right before we are fundamentally and thoroughly right. That is to say, salvation is our deepest need.

Then how does it come that men go on, as so many of my friends here now have gone on, all their days paying no attention to that need? Is there any folly, amidst all the irrationalities of that irrational creature man, to be matched with the folly of steadily refusing to look forward and settle for ourselves the prime element in our condition—viz., our relation to God? Strange is it not—that power that we have of refusing to look at the barometer when it is going down, of turning away from unwholesome subjects just because we know them to be so unwelcome and threatening, and of buying a moment's exemption from discomfort at the price of a life's ruin?

Do you remember that old story of the way in which the prisoners in the time of the French Revolution used to behave? The tumbrils came every morning and carried off a file of them to the guillotine, and the rest of them had a ghastly make-believe of carrying on the old frivolities of the life of the *salons* and of society. And it lasted for an hour or two, but the tumbril came next morning all the same, and the guillotine stood there gaping in the *Place*. And so it is useless, although it is so frequently done by so many of us, to try to shut out facts instead of facing them. A man is never so wise as when he says to himself, 'Let me fairly know the whole truth of my relation to the unseen world in so far as it can be known here, and if that is wrong, let me set about rectifying it if it be possible.' 'What will ye do in the end?' is the wisest question that a man can ask himself, when the end is as certain as it is with us, and as unsatisfactory as I am afraid it threatens to be with some of us if we continue as we are.

Have I not a right to appeal to the half-sleeping and half-waking consciousness that endorses my words in some hearts as I speak? O brethren, you would be far wiser men if you did like this jailer in the Macedonian prison, came and gave yourselves no rest till you have this question cleared up, 'What must I do to be saved?'

There was an old Rabbi who used to preach to his disciples, 'Repent the day before you die.' And when they said to him, 'Rabbi, we do not know what day we are going to die.' 'Then,' said he, 'repent to-day.' And so I say to you, 'Settle about the end before the end comes, and as you do not know when it may come, settle about it now.'

II. That brings me to the next point here, viz., the blessed, clear answer that we may all take.

Paul and Silas were not non-plussed by this question, nor did they reply to it in the fashion in which many men would have answered it. Take a specimen of other answers. If anybody were so far left to himself as to go with this question to some of our modern wise men and teachers, they would say, 'Saved? My good fellow, there is nothing to be saved from. Get rid of delusions, and clear your mind of cant and superstition.' Or they would say, 'Saved? Well, if you have gone wrong, do the best you can in the time to come.' Or if you went to some of our friends they would say, 'Come and be baptized, and receive the grace of regeneration in holy baptism; and then come to the sacraments, and be faithful and loyal members of the Church which has Apostolic succession in it.' And some would say, 'Set yourselves to work and toil and labour.' And some would say, 'Don't trouble yourselves about such whims. A short life and a merry one; make the best of it, and jump the life to come.' Neither cold morality, nor godless philosophy, nor wild dissipation, nor narrow ecclesiasticism prompted Paul's answer. He said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'

What did that poor heathen man know about the Lord Jesus Christ? Next to nothing. How could he believe upon Him if he knew so little about Him? Well, you hear in the context that this summary answer to the question was the beginning, and not the end, of a conversation, which conversation, no doubt, consisted largely in extending and explaining the brief formulary with which it had commenced. But it is a grand thing that we can put the all-essential truth into half a dozen simple words, and then expound and explain them as may be necessary. And I come to you now, dear brethren, with nothing newer or more wonderful, or more out of the ordinary way than the old threadbare message which men have been preaching for nineteen hundred years, and have not exhausted, and which some of you have heard for a lifetime, and have never practised, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.'

Now I am not going to weary you with mere dissertations upon the significance of these words. But let me single out two points about them, which perhaps though they may be perfectly familiar to you, may come to you with fresh force from my lips now.

Mark, first, whom it is that we are to believe on. '*The Lord*,' that is the divine Name; '*Jesus*,' that is the name of a Man; '*Christ*,' that is the name of an office. And if you put them all together, they come to this, that He on whom we sinful men may put our sole trust and hope for our healing and our safety, is the Son of God, who came down upon earth to live our life and to die our death that He might bear on Himself our sins, and fulfil all which ancient prophecy and symbol had proclaimed as needful, and therefore certain to be done, for men. It is not a starved half-Saviour whose name is only Jesus, and neither Lord nor Christ, faith in whom will save you. You must grasp the whole revelation of His nature and His power if from Him there is to flow the life that you need.

And note what it is that we are to exercise towards Jesus Christ. To 'believe on Him' is a very different thing from *believing Him*. You may accept all that I have been saying about who and what He is, and be as far away from the faith that saves a soul as if you had never heard His name. To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is to lean the whole weight of yourselves upon Him. What do you do when you trust a man who promises you any small gift or advantage? What do you do when dear ones say, 'Rest on my love'? You simply trust them. And the very same exercise of heart and mind which is the blessed cement that holds human society together, and the power that sheds peace and grace over friendships and love, is the power which, directed to Jesus Christ, brings all His saving might into exercise in our lives. Brethren, trust Him, trust Him as Lord, trust Him as Jesus, trust Him as Christ. Learn your sickness, learn your danger; and be sure of your Healer and rejoice in your security. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'

III. Lastly, consider the blessing we may all receive.

This jailer about whom we have been speaking was a heathen when the sun set and a Christian when it rose. On the one day he was groping in darkness, a worshipper of idols, without hope in the future, and ready in desperation to plunge himself into the darkness beyond, when he thought his prisoners had fled. In an hour or two 'he rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.'

A sudden conversion, you say, and sudden conversions are always suspicious. I am not so sure about that; they may be, or they may not be, according to circumstances. I know very well that it is not fashionable now to preach the possibility or the probability of men turning all at once from darkness to light, and that people shrug their shoulders at the old theory of sudden conversions. I think, so much the worse. There are a great many things in this world that have to be done suddenly if they are ever to be done at all. And I, for my part, would have far more hope for a man who, in one leap, sprung from the depth of the degradation of that coarse jailer into the light and joy of the Christian life, than for a man who tried to get to it by slow steps. You have to do everything in this world worth doing by a sudden resolution, however long the preparation may have been which led up to the resolution. The act of resolving is always the act of an instant. And when men are plunged in darkness and profligacy, as are, perhaps, some of my hearers now, there is far more chance of their casting off their evil by a sudden jerk than of their unwinding the snake by slow degrees from their arms. There is no reason whatever why the soundest and solidest and most lasting transformation of character should not begin in a moment's resolve.

And there is an immense danger that with some of you, if that change does not begin in a moment's resolve now, you will be further away from it than ever you were. I have no doubt there are many of you who, at any time for years past, have known that you ought to be Christians, and who, at any time for years past, have been saying to yourselves: 'Well, I will think about it, and I am tending towards it.

but I cannot quite make the plunge.' Why not; and why not now? You can if you will; you ought; you will be a better and happier man if you do. You will be saved from your sickness and safe from your danger.

The outcast jailer changed nationalities in a moment. You who have dwelt in the suburbs of Christ's Kingdom all your lives—why cannot you go inside the gate as quickly? For many of us the gradual 'growing up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord' has been the appointed way. For some of us I verily believe the sudden change is the best. Some of us have a sunrise as in the tropics, where the one moment is grey and cold, and next moment the seas are lit with the glory. Others of us have a sunrise as at the poles, where a long slowly-growing light precedes the rising, and the rising itself is scarce observable. But it matters little as to how we get to Christ, if we are there, and it matters little whether a man's faith grows up in a moment, or is the slow product of years. If only it be rooted in Christ it will bear fruit unto life eternal.

And so, dear brethren, I come to you with my last question, this man rejoiced, believing in the Lord; why should not you; and why should not you now? 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' A look is a swift act, but if it be the beginning of a lifelong gaze, it will be the beginning of salvation and of a glory longer than life.

THESSALONICA AND BEREA

[1] Now, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: 2. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, 3. Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. 4. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas: and of the

devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. 5. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; 7. Whom Jason hath received; and these all do contrary to the decrees of Cæsar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. 8. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. 9. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. 10. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.'—ACTS xvii. 1-12.

'SHAMEFULLY entreated at Philippi,' Paul tells the Thessalonians, he 'waxed bold in our God to' preach to them. His experience in the former city might well have daunted a feebler faith, but opposition affected Paul as little as a passing hailstorm dints a rock. To change the field was common sense; to abandon the work would have been sin. But Paul's brave persistence was not due to his own courage; he drew it from God. Because he lived in communion with Him, his courage 'waxed' as dangers gathered. He knew that he was doing a daring thing, but he knew who was his helper. So he went steadily on, whatever might front him. His temper of mind and the source of it are wonderfully revealed in his simple words.

The transference to Thessalonica illustrates another principle of his action; namely, his preference of great centres of population as fields of work. He passes through two less important places to establish himself in the great city. It is wise to fly at the head. Conquer the cities, and the villages will fall of themselves. That was the policy which carried Christianity through the empire like a prairie fire. Would that later missions had adhered to it!

The methods adopted in Thessalonica were the usual ones. Luke bids us notice that Paul took the same course of action in each place: namely, to go to the synagogue first, when there was one, and there to prove that Jesus was the Christ. The three Macedonian towns already mentioned seem not to have had synagogues. Probably there were comparatively few Jews in them, and these were ecclesiastically dependent on Thessalonica. We can fancy the growing excitement in the synagogue, as for three successive Sabbaths the stranger urged his proofs of the two all-important but most unwelcome assertions, that their own scriptures foretold a suffering Messiah,—a side of Messianic prophecy which was ignored or passionately denied—and that Jesus was that Messiah. Many a vehement protest would be shrieked out, with flashing eyes and abundant gesticulation, as he 'opened' the sense of Scripture, and 'quoted passages,'—for that is the meaning here of the word rendered 'alleging.' He gives us a glimpse of the hot discussions when he says that he preached 'in much conflict' (1 Thess. ii. 2).

With whatever differences in manner of presentation, the true message of the Christian teacher is still the message that woke such opposition in the synagogue of Thessalonica,—the bold proclamation of the personal Christ, His death and resurrection. And with whatever differences, the instrument of conviction is still the Scriptures, 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.' The more closely we keep ourselves to that message and that weapon the better.

The effects of the faithful preaching of the gospel are as uniform as the method. It does one of two things to its hearers—either it melts their hearts and leads them to faith, or it stirs them to more violent enmity. It is either a stone of stumbling or a sure corner-stone. We either build on or fall over it, and at last are crushed by it. The converts included Jews and proselytes in larger numbers, as may be gathered from the distinction drawn by 'some'—referring to the former, and 'a great multitude'—referring to the latter. Besides these there were a good many ladies of rank and refinement, as was also the case presently at Berœa. Probably these, too, were proselytes.

The prominence of women among the converts, as soon as the gospel is brought into Europe, is interesting and prophetic. The fact of the social position of these ladies may suggest that the upper classes were freer from superstition than the lower, and may point a not favourable contrast with present social conditions, which do not result in a similar accession of women of 'honourable estate' to the Church.

Opposition follows as uniform a course as the preaching. The broad outlines are the same in each case, while the local colouring varies. If we compare Paul's narrative in 1 Thessalonians, which throbs with emotion, and, as it were, pants with the stress of the conflict, with Luke's calm account here, we see not only how Paul felt, but why the Jews got up a riot. Luke says that they 'became jealous.' Paul expands that into 'they are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved.' Then it was not so much dislike to the preaching of Jesus as Messiah as it was rage that their Jewish prerogative was infringed, and the children's bread offered to the dogs, that stung them to violent opposition. Israel had been chosen, that it might be God's witness, and diffuse the treasure it possessed through all the world. It had become, not the dispenser, but the would-be monopolist, of its gift. Have there been no Christian communities in later days animated by the same spirit?

There were plenty of loafers in the market-place ready for any mischief, and by no means particular about the pretext for a riot. Anything that would give an opportunity for hurting somebody, and for loot, would attract them as corruption does flesh-flies. So the Jewish ringleaders easily got a crowd together. To tell their real reasons would scarcely have done, but to say that there was a house to be attacked, and some foreigners to be dragged out, was enough for the present. Jason's house was probably Paul's temporary home, where, as he tells us in 1 Thessalonians ii. 9, he had worked at his trade, that he might not be burdensome to any. Possibly he and Silas had been warned of the approach of the rioters and had got away elsewhere. At all events, the nest was empty, but the crowd must have its victims, and so, failing Paul, they laid hold of Jason. His offence was a very shadowy one. But since his day there have been many martyrs, whose only crime was 'harbouring' Christians, or heretics, or recusant priests, or Covenanters. If a bull cannot gore a man, it will toss his cloak.

The charge against Jason is that he receives the Apostle and his party, and constructively favours their designs. The charge against them is that they are revolutionists, rebels against the Emperor, and partisans of a rival. Now we may note three things about the charge. First, it comes with a very distinct taint of insincerity from Jews, who were, to say the least, not remarkable for loyalty or peaceful obedience. The Gracchi are complaining of sedition! A Jew zealous for Cæsar is an anomaly, which might excite the suspicions of the least suspicious ruler. The charge of breaking the peace comes with remarkable appropriateness from the leaders of a riot. They were the troublers of the city, not Paul, peacefully preaching in the synagogue. The wolf scolds the lamb for fouling the river.

Again, the charges are a violent distortion of the truth. Possibly the Jewish ringleaders believed what they said, but more probably they consciously twisted Paul's teachings, because they knew that no other charges would excite so much hostility or be so damning as those which they made. The mere suggestion of treason was often fatal. The wild exaggeration that the Christians had 'turned the whole civilised world upside down' betrays passionate hatred and alarm, if it was genuine, or crafty determination to rouse the mob, if it was consciously trumped up. But whether the charges were believed or not by those who made them, here were Jews disclaiming their nation's dearest hope, and, like the yelling crowd at the Crucifixion, declaring they had no king but Cæsar. The degradation of Israel was completed by these fanatical upholders of its prerogatives.

But, again, the charges were true in a far other sense than their bringers meant. For Christianity is revolutionary, and its very aim is to turn the world upside down, since the wrong side is uppermost at present, and Jesus, not Cæsar, or any king or emperor or czar, is the true Lord and ruler of men. But the revolution which He makes is the revolution of individuals, turning them from darkness to light; for He moulds single souls first and society afterwards. Violence is always a mistake, and the only way to change evil customs is to change men's natures, and then the customs drop away of themselves. The true rule begins with the sway of hearts; then wills are submissive, and conduct is the expression of inward delight in a law which is sweet because the lawgiver is dear.

Missing Paul, the mob fell on Jason and the brethren.

They were 'bound over to keep the peace.' Evidently the rulers had little fear of these alleged desperate revolutionaries, and did as little as they dared, without incurring the reproach of being tepid in their loyalty.

Probably the removal of Paul and his travelling companions from the neighbourhood was included in the terms to which Jason had to submit. Their hurried departure does not seem to have been caused by a renewal of disturbances. At all events, their Berœan experience repeated that of Philippi and of Thessalonica, with one great and welcome difference. The Berœan Jews did exactly what their compatriots elsewhere would not do—they looked into the subject with their own eyes, and tested Paul's assertions by Scripture. 'Therefore,' says Luke, with grand confidence in the impregnable foundations of the faith, 'many of them believed.' True nobility of soul consists in willingness to receive the Word, combined with diligent testing of it. Christ asks for no blind adhesion. The true Christian teacher wishes for no renunciation, on the part of his hearers, of their own judgments. 'Open your mouth and shut your eyes, and swallow what I give you,' is not the language of Christianity, though it has sometimes been the demand of its professed missionaries, and not the teacher only, but the taught also, have been but too ready to exercise blind credulity instead of intelligent examination and clear-eyed faith. If professing Christians to-day were better acquainted with the Scriptures, and more in the habit of bringing every new doctrine to them as its touchstone, there would be less currency of errors and firmer grip of truth.

PAUL AT ATHENS

'Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars-hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. 23. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To the Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. 24. God, that made the world, and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25. Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26. And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; 27. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: 28. For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. 29. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. 30. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31. Because he hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead. 32. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. 33. So Paul departed from among them. 34. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.'—ACTS xvii. 22-34.

'I AM become all things to all men,' said Paul, and his address at Athens strikingly exemplifies that principle of his action. Contrast it with his speech in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch, which appeals entirely to the Old Testament, and is saturated with Jewish ideas, or with the remonstrance to the rude Lycaonian peasants (Acts xiv. 15, etc.), which, while handling some of the same thoughts as at Athens, does so in a remarkably different manner. There he appealed to God's gifts of 'rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons,' the things most close to his hearers' experience; here, speaking to educated 'philosophers,' he quotes Greek poetry, and sets forth a reasoned declaration of the nature of the Godhead and the relations of a philosophy of history and an argument against idolatry. The glories of Greek art were around him; the statues of Pallas Athene and many more fair creations looked down on the little Jew who dared to proclaim their nullity as representations of the Godhead.

Paul's flexibility of mind and power of adapting himself to every circumstance were never more strikingly shown than in that great address to the quick-witted Athenians. It falls into three parts: the conciliatory prelude (vers. 22, 23); the declaration of the Unknown God (vers. 24-29); and the proclamation of the God-ordained Man (vers. 30, 31).

I. We have, first, the conciliatory prelude. It is always a mistake for the apostle of a new truth to begin by running a tilt at old errors. It is common sense to seek to find some point in the present beliefs of his hearers to which his message may attach itself. An orator who flatters for the sake of securing favour for himself is despicable; a missionary who recognises the truth which lies under the system which he seeks to overthrow, is wise.

It is incredible that Paul should have begun his speech to so critical an audience by charging them with excessive superstition, as the Authorised Version makes him do. Nor does the modified translation of the Revised Version seem to be precisely what is meant. Paul is not blaming the Athenians, but recording a fact which he had noticed, and from which he desired to start. Ramsay's translation gives the truer notion of his meaning—'more than others respectful of what is divine.' 'Superstition' necessarily conveys a sense of blame, but the word in the original does not.

We can see Paul as a stranger wandering through the city, and noting with keen eyes every token of the all-pervading idolatry. He does not tell his hearers that his spirit burned within him when he saw the city full of idols; but he smothers all that, and speaks only of the inscription which he had noticed on one, probably obscure and forgotten, altar: 'To the Unknown God'

Scholars have given themselves a great deal of trouble to show from other authors that there were such altars. But Paul is as good an 'authority' as these, and we may take his word that he did see such an inscription. Whether it had the full significance which he reads into it or not, it crystallised in an express avowal that sense of Something behind and above the 'gods many' of Greek religion, which found expression in the words of their noblest thinkers and poets, and lay like a nightmare on them.

To charge an Athenian audience, proud of their knowledge, with ignorance, was a hazardous and audacious undertaking; to make them charge themselves was more than an oratorical device. It appealed to the deepest consciousness even of the popular mind. Even with this prelude, the claims of this wandering Jew to pose as the instructor of Epicureans and Stoics, and to possess a knowledge of the Divine which they lacked, were daring. But how calmly and confidently Paul makes them, and with what easy and conciliatory adoption of their own terminology, if we adopt the reading of verse 23 in Revised Version ('What ye worship . . . this,' etc.), which puts forward the abstract conception of divinity rather than the personal God.

The spirit in which Paul approached his difficult audience teaches all Christian missionaries and controversialists a needed and neglected lesson. We should accentuate points of resemblance rather than of difference, to begin with. We should not run a tilt against even errors, and so provoke to their defence, but rather find in creeds and practices an ignorant groping after, and so a door of entrance for, the truth which we seek to recommend.

II. The declaration of the Unknown God has been prepared for, and now follows, and with it is bound up a polemic against idolatry. Conciliation is not to be carried so far as to hide the antagonism between the truth and error. We may give non-Christian systems of religion credit for all the good in them, but we are not to blink their contrariety to the true religion. Conciliation and controversy are both needful; and he is the best Christian teacher who has mastered the secret of the due proportion between them.

Every word of Paul's proclamation strikes full and square at some counter belief of his hearers. He begins with creation, which he declares to have been the act of one personal God, and neither of a multitude of deities, as some of his hearers held, nor of an impersonal blind power, as others believed, nor the result of chance, nor eternal, as others maintained. He boldly proclaims there, below the shadow of the Parthenon, that there is but one God,—the universal Lord, because the universal Creator. Many consequences from that fact, no doubt, crowded into Paul's mind; but he swiftly turns to its bearing on the pomp of temples which were the glory of Athens, and the multitude of sacrifices which he had beheld on their altars. The true conception of God as the Creator and Lord of all things cuts up by the roots the pagan notions of temples as dwelling-places of a god and of sacrifices as ministering to his needs. With one crushing blow Paul pulverises the fair fanes around him, and declares that sacrifice, as practised there, contradicted the plain truth as to God's nature. To suppose that man can give anything to Him, or that He needs anything, is absurd. All heathen worship reverses the parts of God and man, and loses sight of the fact that He is the giver continually and of everything. Life in its origination, the continuance thereof (breath), and all which enriches it, are from Him. Then true worship will not be giving to, but thankfully accepting from and using for, Him, His manifold gifts.

So Paul declares the one God as Creator and Sustainer of all. He goes on to sketch in broad outline what we may call a philosophy of history. The declaration of the unity of mankind was a wholly strange message to proud Athenians, who believed themselves to be a race apart, not only from the 'barbarians,' whom all Greeks regarded as made of other clay than they, but from the rest of the Greek world. It flatly contradicted one of their most cherished prerogatives. Not only does Paul claim one origin for all men, but he regards all nations as equally cared for by the one God. His hearers believed that each people had its own patron deities, and that the wars of nations were the wars of their gods, who won for them territory, and presided over their national fortunes. To all that way of thinking the Apostle opposes the conception, which naturally follows from his fundamental declaration of the one Creator, of His providential guidance of all nations in regard to their place in the world and the epochs of their history.

But he rises still higher when he declares the divine purpose in all the tangled web of history—the variety of conditions of nations, their rise and fall, their glory and decay, their planting in their lands and their rooting out,—to be to lead all men to 'seek God.' That is the deepest meaning of history. The whole course of human affairs is God's drawing men to Himself. Not only in Judea, nor only by special revelation, but by the gifts bestowed, and the schooling brought to bear on every nation, He would stir men up to seek for Him.

But that great purpose has not been realised. There is a tragic 'if haply' inevitable; and men may refuse to yield to the impulses towards God. They are the more likely to do so, inasmuch as to find Him they must 'feel after Him,' and that is hard. The tendrils of a plant turn to the far-off light, but men's spirits do not thus grope after God. Something has come in the way which frustrates the divine purpose, and makes men blind and unwilling to seek Him.

Paul does not at once draw the two plain inferences, that there must be something more than the nations have had, if they are to find God, even His seeking them in some new fashion; and that the power which neutralises God's design in creation and providence is sin. He has a word to say about both these, but for the moment he contents himself with pointing to the fact, attested by his hearers' consciousness, and by many a saying of thinkers and poets, that the failure to find God does not arise from His hiding Himself in some remote obscurity. Men are plunged, as it were, in the ocean of God, encompassed by Him as an atmosphere, and—highest thought of all, and not strange to Greek thought of the nobler sort—kindred with Him as both drawing life from Him and being in His image. Whence, then, but from their own fault, could men have failed to find God? If He is 'unknown,' it is not because He has shrouded Himself in darkness, but because they do not love the light. One swift glance at the folly of idolatry, as demonstrated by this thought of man's being the offspring of God, leads naturally to the properly Christian conclusion of the address.

III. It is probable that this part of it was prematurely ended by the mockery of some and the impatience of others, who had had enough of Paul and his talk, and who, when they said, 'We will hear thee again,' meant, 'We will not hear you now.' But, even in the compass permitted him, he gives much of his message.

We can but briefly note the course of thought. He comes back to his former word 'ignorance,' bitter pill as it was for the Athenian cultured class to swallow. He has shown them how their religion ignores or contradicts the true conceptions of God and man. But he no sooner brings the charge than he proclaims God's forbearance. And he no sooner proclaims God's forbearance than he rises to the full height of his mission as God's ambassador, and speaks in authoritative tones, as bearing His 'commands.'

Now the hint in the previous part is made more plain. The demand for repentance implies sin. Then the 'ignorance' was not inevitable or innocent. There was an element of guilt in men's not feeling after God. and sin is universal, for 'all men everywhere' are summoned to repent. Philosophers and artists, and cultivated triflers, and sincere worshippers of Pallas and Zeus, and all 'barbarian' people, are alike here. That would grate on Athenian pride, as it grates now on ours. The reason for repentance would be as strange to the hearers as the command was—a universal judgment, of which the principle was to be rigid righteousness, and the Judge, not Minos or Rhadamanthus, but 'a Man' ordained for that function.

What raving nonsense that would appear to men who had largely lost the belief in a life beyond the grave! The universal Judge a man! No wonder that the quick Athenian sense of the ridiculous began to rise against this Jew fanatic, bringing his dreams among cultured people like them! And the proof which he alleged as evidence to all men that it is so, would sound even more ridiculous than the assertion meant to be proved. 'A man has been raised from the dead; and this anonymous Man, whom nobody ever heard of before, and who is no doubt one of the speaker's countrymen, is to judge us, Stoics, Epicureans, polished people, and we are to be herded to His bar in company with Bœotians and barbarians! The man is mad.'

So the assembly broke up in inextinguishable laughter, and Paul silently 'departed from among them,' having never named the name of Jesus to them. He never more earnestly tried to adapt his teaching to his audience; he never was more unsuccessful in his attempt by all means to gain some. Was it a remembrance of that scene in Athens that made him write to the Corinthians that his message was 'to the Greeks foolishness'?

THE MAN WHO IS JUDGE

'. . . He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.'—ACTS xvii. 31.

I. The Resurrection of Jesus gives assurance of judgment.

(*a*) Christ's Resurrection is the pledge of ours.

The belief in a future life, as entertained by Paul's hearers on Mars Hill, was shadowy and dashed with much unbelief. Disembodied spirits wandered ghostlike and spectral in a shadowy underworld.

The belief in the Resurrection of Jesus converts the Greek peradventure into a fact. It gives that belief solidity and makes it easier to grasp firmly. Unless the thought of a future life is completed by the belief that it is a corporeal life, it will never have definiteness and reality enough to sustain itself as a counterpoise to the weight of things seen.

(b) Resurrection implies judgment.

A future bodily life affirms individual identity as persisting beyond the accident of death, and can only be conceived of as a state in which the earthly life is fully developed in its individual results. The dead, who are raised, are raised that they may 'receive the things done in the body, according to that they have done, whether it be good or bad.' Historically, the two thoughts have always gone together; and as has been the clearness with which a resurrection has been held as certain, so has been the force with which the anticipation of judgment to come has impinged on conscience.

Jesus is, even in this respect, our Example, for the glory to which He was raised and in which He reigns now is the issue of His earthly life; and in His Resurrection and Ascension we have the historical fact which certifies to all men that a life of self-sacrifice here will assuredly flower into a life of glory there, 'Ours the Cross, the grave, the skies.'

II. The Resurrection of Jesus gives the assurance that He is Judge.

The bare fact that He is risen does not carry that assurance; we have to take into account that He has risen.

After such a life.

His Resurrection was God's setting the seal of His approval and acceptance on Christ's work; His endorsement of Christ's claims to special relations with Him; His affirmation of Christ's sinlessness. Jesus had declared that He did always the things that pleased the

Father; had claimed to be the pure and perfect realisation of the divine ideal of manhood; had presented Himself as the legitimate object of utter devotion and of religious trust, love, and obedience, and as the only way to God. Men said that He was a blasphemer; God said, and said most emphatically, by raising Him from the dead: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

With such a sequel.

'Christ being raised from the dead, dieth no more,' and that fact sets Him apart from others who, according to Scripture, have been raised. His resurrection is, if we may use such a figure, a point; His Ascension and Session at the right hand of God are the line into which the point is prolonged. And from both the point and the line come the assurance that He is the Judge.

III. The risen Jesus is Judge because He is Man.

That seems a paradox. It is a commonplace that we are incompetent to judge another, for human eyes cannot read the secrets of a human heart, and we can only surmise, not know, each other's motives, which are the all-important part of our deeds. But when we rightly understand Christ's human nature, we understand how fitted He is to be our Judge, and how blessed it is to think of Him as such. Paul tells the Athenians with deep significance that He who is to be their and the world's Judge is 'the Man.' He sums up human nature in Himself, He is the ideal and the real Man.

And further, Paul tells his hearers that God judges 'through' Him, and does so 'in righteousness.' He is fitted to be our Judge, because He perfectly and completely bears our nature, knows by experience all its weaknesses and windings, as from the inside, so to speak, and is ‘wondrous kind’ with the kindness which ‘fellow-feeling’ enkindles. He knows us with the knowledge of a God; He knows us with the sympathy of a brother.

The Man who has died for all men thereby becomes the Judge of all. Even in this life, Jesus and His Cross judge us. Our disposition towards Him is the test of our whole character. By their attitude to Him, the thoughts of many hearts are revealed. ‘What think ye of Christ?’ is the question, the answer to which determines our fate, because it reveals our inmost selves and their capacities for receiving blessing or harm from God and His mercy. Jesus Himself has taught us that ‘in that day’ the condition of entrance into the Kingdom is ‘doing the will of My Father which is in heaven.’ He has also taught us that ‘this is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.’ Faith in Jesus as our Saviour is the root from which will grow the good tree which will bring forth good fruit, bearing which our love will be ‘made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment.’

PAUL AT CORINTH

‘After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; 2. And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. 3. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tent-makers. 4. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. 5. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. 6. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. 7. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. 9. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10. For I am with thee, and no man

shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. 11. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.' —Acts xviii. 1-11.

Solitude is a hard trial for sensitive natures, and tends to weaken their power of work. Paul was entirely alone in Athens, and appears to have cut his stay there short, since his two companions, who were to have joined him in that city, did not do so till after he had been some time in Corinth. His long stay there has several well-marked stages, which yield valuable lessons.

I. First, we note the solitary Apostle, seeking friends, toiling for bread, and withal preaching Christ. Corinth was a centre of commerce, of wealth, and of moral corruption. The celebrated local worship of Aphrodite fed the corruption as well as the wealth. The Apostle met there with a new phase of Greek life, no less formidable in antagonism to the Gospel than the culture of Athens. He tells us that he entered on his work in Corinth 'in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,' but also that he did not try to attract by adaptation of his words to the prevailing tastes either of Greek or Jew, but preached 'Jesus Christ and Him crucified,' knowing that, while that appeared to go right in the teeth of the demands of both, it really met their wants. This ministry was begun, in his usual fashion, very unobtrusively and quietly. His first care was to find a home; his second, to provide his daily bread; and then he was free to take the Sabbath for Christian work in the synagogue.

We cannot tell whether he had had any previous acquaintance with Aquila and his wife, nor indeed is it certain that they had previously been Christians. Paul's reason for living with them was simply the convenience of getting work at his trade, and it seems probable that, if they had been disciples, that fact would have been named as part of his reason. Pontus lay to the north of Cilicia, and though widely separated from it, was near enough to make a kind of bond as of fellow-countrymen, which would be the stronger because they had the same craft at their finger-ends.

It was the wholesome practice for every Rabbi to learn some trade. If all graduates had to do the same now there would be fewer educated idlers, who are dangerous to society and burdens to themselves and their friends. What a curl of contempt would have lifted the lips of the rich men of Corinth if they had been told that the greatest man in their city was that little Jew tent-maker, and that in this unostentatious fashion he had begun to preach truths which would be like a charge of dynamite to all their social and religious order! True zeal can be patiently silent.

Sewing rough goat's-hair cloth into tents may be as truly serving Christ as preaching His name. All manner of work that contributes to the same end is the same in worth and in recompense. Perhaps the wholesomest form of Christian ministry is that after the Apostolic pattern, when the teacher can say, as Paul did to the people of Corinth, 'When I was present with you and was in want, I was not a burden on any man.' If not in letter, at any rate in spirit, his example must be followed. If the preacher would win souls he must be free from any taint of suspicion as to money.

II. The second stage in Paul's Corinthian residence is the increased activity when his friends, Silas and Timothy, came from Berœa. We learn from Philippians iv. 15, and 2 Corinthians xi. 9, that they brought gifts from the Church at Philippi; and from 1 Thessalonians

iii. 6, that they brought something still more gladdening namely, good accounts of the steadfastness of the Thessalonian converts. The money would make it less necessary to spend most of the week in manual labour; the glad tidings of the Thessalonians' 'faith and love' did bring fresh life, and the presence of his helpers would cheer him. So a period of enlarged activity followed their coming.

The reading of verse 5, 'Paul was constrained by the word,' brings out strikingly the Christian impulse which makes speech of the Gospel a necessity. The force of that impulse may vary, as it did with Paul; but if we have any deep possession of the grace of God for ourselves, we shall, like him, feel it pressing us for utterance, as soon as the need of providing daily bread becomes less stringent and our hearts are gladdened by Christian communion. It augurs ill for a man's hold of the word if the word does not hold him. He who never felt that he was weary of forbearing, and that the word was like a fire, if it was 'shut up in his bones,' has need to ask himself if he has any belief in the Gospel. The craving to impart ever accompanies real possession.

The Apostle's solemn symbolism, announcing his cessation of efforts among the Jews, has of course reference only to Corinth, for we find him in his subsequent ministry adhering to his method, 'to the Jew first.' It is a great part of Christian wisdom in evangelical work to recognise the right time to give up efforts which have been fruitless. Much strength is wasted and many hearts depressed, by obstinate continuance in such methods or on such fields as have cost much effort and yielded no fruit. We often call it faith, when it is only pride, which prevents the acknowledgment of failure. Better to learn the lessons taught by Providence, and to try a new 'claim,' than to keep on digging and washing when we only find sand and mud. God teaches us by failures as well as by successes. Let us not be too conceited to learn the lesson or to confess defeat, and shift our ground accordingly.

It is a solemn thing to say 'I am clean.' We need to have been very diligent, very loving, very prayerful to God, and very persuasive in pleading with men, before we dare to roll all the blame of their condemnation on themselves. But we have no right to say, 'Henceforth I go to' others, until we can say that we have done all that man—or, at any rate, that we—can do to avert the doom.

Paul did not go so far away but that any whose hearts God had touched could easily find him. It was with a lingering eye to his countrymen that he took up his abode in the house of 'one that feared God,' that is, a proselyte; and that he settled down next door to the synagogue. What a glimpse of yearning love which cannot bear to give Israel up as hopeless, that simple detail gives us! And may we not say that the yearning of the servant is caught from the example of the Master? 'How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?' Does not Christ, in His long-suffering love, linger in like manner round each closed heart? and if He withdraws a little way, does He not do so rather to stimulate search after Him, and tarry near enough to be found by every seeking heart?

Paul's purpose in his solemn warning to the Jews of Corinth was partly accomplished. The ruler of the synagogue 'believed in the Lord with all his house.' Thus men are sometimes brought to decision for Christ by the apparently impending possibility of His Gospel leaving them to themselves. 'Blessings brighten as they take their flight.' Severity sometimes effects what forbearance fails to achieve. If the train is on the point of starting, the hesitating passenger will swiftly make up his mind and rush for a seat. It is permissible to press for immediate decision on the ground that the time is short, and that soon these things 'will be hid from the eyes.'

We learn from 1 Corinthians i. 14, that Paul deviated from his usual practice, and himself baptized Crispus. We may be very sure that his doing so arose from no unworthy subserviency to an important convert, but indicated how deeply grateful he was to the Lord for giving him, as a seal to a ministry which had seemed barren, so encouraging a token. The opposition and blasphemy of many are outweighed, to a true evangelist, by the conversion of one; and while all souls are in one aspect equally valuable, they are unequal in the influence which they may exert on others. So it was with Crispus, for 'many of the Corinthians hearing' of such a signal fact as the conversion of the chief of the synagogue, likewise 'believed.' We may distinguish in our estimate of the value of converts, without being untrue to the great principle that all men are equally precious in Christ's eyes.

III. The next stage is the vision to Paul and his consequent protracted residence in Corinth. God does not waste visions, nor bid men put away fears which are not haunting them. This vision enables us to conceive Paul's state of mind when it came to him. He was for some reason cast down. He had not been so when things looked much more hopeless. But though now he had his friends and many converts, some mood of sadness crept over him. Men like him are often swayed by impulses rising within, and quite apart from outward circumstances. Possibly he had reason to apprehend that his very success had sharpened hostility, and to anticipate danger to life. The contents of the vision make this not improbable.

But the mere calming of fear, worthy object as it is, is by no means the main part of the message of the vision. 'Speak, and hold not thy peace,' is its central word. Fear which makes a Christian dumb is always cowardly, and always exaggerated. Speech which comes from trembling lips may be very powerful, and there is no better remedy for terror than work for Christ. If we screw ourselves up to do what we fear to do, the dread vanishes, as a bather recovers himself as soon as his head has once been under water.

Why was Paul not to be afraid? It is easy to say, 'Fear not,' but unless the exhortation is accompanied with some good reason shown, it is wasted breath. Paul got a truth put into his heart which ends all fear—'For I am with thee.' Surely that is enough to exorcise all demons of cowardice or despondency, and it is the assurance that all Christ's servants may lay up in their hearts, for use at all moments and in all moods. His presence, in no metaphor, but in deepest inmost reality, is theirs, and whether their fears come from without or within, His presence is more than enough to make them brave and strong.

Paul needed a vision, for Paul had never seen Christ 'after the flesh,' nor heard His parting promise. We do not need it, for we have the unalterable word, which He left with all His disciples when He ascended, and which remains true to the ends of the world and till the world ends.

The consequence of Christ's presence is not exemption from attacks, but preservation in them. Men may 'set on' Paul, but they cannot 'hurt' him. The promise was literally fulfilled when the would-be accusers were contemptuously sent away by Gallio, the embodiment of Roman even-handedness and despising of the deepest things. It is fulfilled no less truly to-day; for no hurt can come to us if Christ is with us, and whatever does come is not hurt.

'I have much people in this city.' Jesus saw what Paul did not, the souls yet to be won for Him. That loving Eye gladly beholds His own sheep, though they may be yet in danger of the wolves, and far from the Shepherd. 'Them also He must bring'; and His servants are wise if, in all their labours, they cherish the courage that comes from the consciousness of His presence, and the unquenchable hope, which sees in the most degraded and alienated those whom the Good Shepherd will yet find in the wilderness and bear back to the fold. Such a hope will quicken them for all service, and such a vision will embolden them in all peril.

'CONSTRAINED BY THE WORD'

'And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified.'--ACTS xviii. 5.

THE Revised Version, in concurrence with most recent authorities, reads, instead of 'pressed in the spirit,' 'constrained by the word.' One of these alterations depends on a diversity of reading, the other on a difference of translation. The one introduces a significant difference of meaning; the other is rather a change of expression. The word rendered here 'pressed,' and by the Revised Version 'constrained,' is employed in its literal use in 'Master, the multitude throng Thee and *press* Thee,' and in its metaphorical application in 'The love of Christ *constraineth us.*' There is not much difference between 'constrained' and 'pressed,' but there is a large difference between 'in the spirit' and 'by the word.' 'Pressed in the spirit' simply describes a state of feeling or mind; 'constrained by the word' declares the force which brought about that condition of pressure or constraint. What then does 'constrained by the word' refer to? It indicates that Paul's message had a grip of him, and held him hard, and forced him to deliver it.

One more preliminary remark is that our text evidently brings this state of mind of the Apostle, and the coming of his two friends Silas and Timothy, into relation as cause and effect. He had been alone in Corinth. His work of late had not been encouraging. He had been comparatively silent there, and had spent most of his time in tent-making. But when his two friends came a cloud was lifted off his spirit, and he sprang back again, as it were, to his old form and to his old work.

Now if we take that point of view with regard to the passage before us, I think we shall find that it yields valuable lessons, some of which I wish to try to enforce now.

I. Let me ask you to look with me at the downcast Apostle.

'Downcast,' you say; 'is not that an unworthy word to use about a minister of Jesus Christ inspired as Paul was?' By no means. We shall very much mistake both the nature of inspiration and the character of this inspired Apostle, if we do not recognise that he was a man of many moods and tremulously susceptible to external influences. Such music would never have come from him if his soul had not been like an Æolian harp, hung in a tree and vibrating in response to every breeze. And so we need not hesitate to speak of the Apostle's mood, as revealed to us in the passage before us, as being downcast.

Now notice that in the verses preceding my text his conduct is extremely abnormal and unlike his usual procedure. He goes into Corinth, and he does next to nothing in evangelistic work. He repairs to the synagogue once a week, and talks to the Jews there. But that is all. The notice of his reasoning in the synagogue is quite subordinate to the notice that he was occupied in finding a lodging with another pauper Jew and stranger in the great city, and that these two poor men went into a kind of partnership, and tried to earn a living by hard work. Such procedure makes a singular contrast to Paul's usual methods in a strange city.

Now the reason for that slackening of impulse and comparative cessation of activity is not far to seek. The first Epistle to Thessalonica was written immediately after these two brethren rejoined Paul. And how does the Apostle describe in that letter his feelings before they came? He speaks of 'all our distress and affliction.' He tells that he was tortured by anxiety as to how the new converts in Thessalonica were getting on, and could not forbear to try to find out whether they were still standing steadfast. Again in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, you will find that there, looking back to this period, he describes his feelings in similar fashion and says: 'I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.' And if you look forward a verse or two in our chapter you will see that a vision came to Paul, which presupposes that some touch of fear, and some temptation to silence, were busy in his heart. For God shapes His communications according to our need, and would not have said, 'Do not be afraid, and hold not thy peace, but speak,' unless there had been a danger both of Paul's being frightened and of his being dumb.

And what thus brought a cloud over his sky? A little exercise of historical imagination will very sufficiently answer that. A few weeks before, in obedience, as he believed, to a direct divine command, Paul had made a plunge, and ventured upon an altogether new phase of work. He had crossed into Europe, and from the moment that he landed at the harbour of Philippi, up to the time when he took refuge in some quiet little room in Corinth, he had had nothing but trouble and danger and disappointment. The prison at Philippi, the riots that hounded him out of Thessalonica, the stealthy, hurried escape from Berœa, the almost entire failure of his first attempt to preach the Gospel to Greeks in Athens, his loneliness, and the strangeness of his surroundings in the luxurious, wicked, wealthy Greek city of Corinth—all these things weighed on him, and there is no wonder that his spirits went down, and he felt that now he must lie fallow for a time and rest, and pull himself together again.

So here we have, in this great champion of the faith, in this strong runner of the Christian race, in this chief of men, an example of the fluctuation of mood, the variation in the way in which we look at our duties and our obligations and our difficulties, the slackening of the impulse which dominates our lives, that are too familiar to us all. It brings Paul nearer us to feel that he, too, knew these ups and downs. The force that drove this meteor through the darkness varied, as the force that impels us varies to our consciousness. It is the prerogative of God to be immutable; men have their moods and their fluctuations. Kindled lights flicker; the sun burns steadily. An Elijah to-day beards Ahab and Jezebel and all their priests, and to-morrow hides his head in his hands, and says, 'Take me away, I am not better than my fathers.' There will be ups and down in the Christian vigour of our lives, as well as in all other regions, so long as men dwell in this material body and are surrounded by their present circumstances.

Brethren, it is no small part of Christian wisdom and prudence to recognise this fact, both in order that it may prevent us from becoming unduly doubtful of ourselves when the ebb tide sets in on our souls, and also in order that we may lay to heart this other truth, that because these moods and changes of aspect and of vigour *will* come to us, therefore the law of life must be effort, and the duty of every Christian man be to minimise, in so far as possible, the fluctuations which, in some degree, are inevitable. No human hand has ever drawn an absolutely straight line. That is the ideal of the mathematician, but all ours are crooked. But we may indefinitely diminish the magnitude of the curves. No two atoms are so close together as that there is no film between them. No human life has ever been an absolutely continuous, unbroken series of equally holy and devoted thoughts and acts, but we may diminish the intervals between kindred states, and may make our lives so far uniform as that to a bystander they shall look like the bright circle, which a brand whirled round in the air makes the impression of, on the eye that beholds. We shall have times of brightness and of less brilliancy, of vigour and of consequent reaction and exhaustion. But Christianity has, for one of its objects, to help us to master our moods, and to bring us nearer and nearer, by continual growth, to the steadfast, unmovable attitude of those whose faith is ever the same.

Do not forget the plain lesson which comes from the incident before us—viz., that the wisest thing that a man can do, when he feels that the wheels of his religious being are driving heavily, is to set himself doggedly to the plain, homely work of daily life. Paul did not sit and bemoan himself because he felt this slackening of impulse, but he went away to Aquila, and said, 'Let us set to work and make camel's-hair cloth and tents.' Be thankful for your homely, prosaic, secular, daily task. You do not know from how many sickly fancies it saves you, and how many breaches in the continuity of your Christian feeling it may bridge over. It takes you away from thinking about yourselves, and sometimes you cannot think about anything less profitably. So stick to your work; and if ever you feel, as Paul did, 'cast down,' be sure that the workshop, the office, the desk, the kitchen will prevent you from being 'destroyed,' if you give yourselves to the plain duties which no moods alter, but which can alter a great many moods.

II. And now note the 'constraining word.'

I have already said that the return of the two, who had been sent to see how things were going with the recent converts in the infant Churches, brought the Apostle good tidings, and so lifted off a great load of anxiety from his heart. No wonder! He had left raw recruits under fire, with no captain, and he might well doubt whether they would keep their ranks. But they did. So the pressure was lifted off, and the pressure being lifted off, spontaneously the old impulse gripped him once more; like a spring which leaps back to its ancient curve when some alien force is taken from it. It must have been a very deep and a very habitual impulse, which thus instantly reasserted itself the moment that the pressure of anxiety was taken out of the way.

The word constrained him. What to do? To declare it. Paul's example brings up two thoughts—that that impulse may vary at times, according to the pressure of circumstances, and may even be held in abeyance for a while; and that if a man is honestly and really a Christian, as soon as the incumbent pressure is taken away, he will feel, 'Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel.' For though Paul's sphere of work was different from ours, his obligation to work and his impulse to work were such as are, or should be, common to all Christians. The impulse to utter the word that we believe and live by seems to me to be, in its very nature, inseparable from earnest Christian faith. All emotion demands expression; and if a man has never felt that he must let his Christian faith have vent, it is a very bad sign. As certainly as fermentation or effervescence demands outgush, so certainly does emotion demand expression. We all know that. The same impulse that makes a mother bend over her babe with unmeaning words and tokens that seem to unsympathetic onlookers foolish, ought to influence all Christians to speak the Name they love. All conviction demands expression. There may be truths which have so little bearing upon human life that he who perceives them feels little obligation to say anything about them. But these are the exceptions; and the more weighty and the more closely affecting human interests anything that we have learned to believe as truth is, the more do we feel in our hearts that, in making us its believers, it has made us its apostles. Christ's saying, 'What ye hear in the ear, that preach ye on the housetops,' expresses a universal truth which is realised in many regions, and ought to be most emphatically realised in the Christian. For surely of all the truths that men can catch a glimpse of, or grapple to their hearts, or store in their understandings, there are none which bring with them such tremendous consequences, and therefore are of so solemn import to proclaim to all the children of men, as the truth, which we profess we have received, of personal salvation through Jesus Christ.

If there never had been a single commandment to that effect, I know not how the Christian Church or the Christian individual could have abstained from declaring the great and sweet Name to which it and he owe so much. I do not care to present this matter as a commandment, nor to speak now of obligation or responsibility. The *impulse* is what I would fix your attention upon. It is inseparable from the Christian life. It may vary in force, as we see in the incident before us. It will vary in grip, according as other circumstances and duties insist upon being attended to. The form in which it is yielded to will vary indefinitely in individuals. But if they are Christian people it is always there.

Well then, what about the masses of so-called Christians who feel nothing of any such constraining force? And what about the many who feel enough of it to make them also feel that they are wrong in not yielding to it, but not enough to make their conduct be influenced by it? Brethren, I venture to believe that the measure in which this impulse to speak the word and use direct efforts for somebody's conversion is felt by Christians, is a very fair test of the depth of their own religion. If a vessel is half empty it will not run over. If it is full to the brim, the sparkling treasure will fall on all sides. A weak plant may never push its green leaves above the ground, but a strong one will rise into the light. A spark may be smothered in a heap of brushwood, but a steady flame will burn its way out. If this word has not a grip of you, impelling you to its utterance, I would have you not to be too sure that you have a grip of it.

III. Lastly, we have here the witness to the word.

'He was constrained by the word, *testifying*.' Now I do not know whether it is imposing too much meaning upon a non-significant difference of expression, if I ask you to note the difference between that phrase and the one which describes his previous activity: 'He *reasoned* in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade' the Jews and the Greeks, but when the old impulse came back in new force, *reasoning* was far too cold a method, and Paul took to *testifying*. Whether that be so or no, mark that the witness of one's own personal conviction and experience is the strongest weapon that a Christian can use. I do not despise the place of reasoning, but arguments do not often change opinions; they never change hearts. Logic and controversial discoursing may 'prepare the way of the Lord,' but it is 'in the wilderness.' But when a man calls aloud, 'Come and hear all ye, and I will declare what God hath done for my soul'; or when he tells his brother, 'We have found the Messias'; or when he sticks to 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see,' it is difficult for any one to resist, and impossible for any one to answer, that way of testifying.

It is a way that we can all adopt if we will. Christian men and women can all say such things. I do not forget that there are indirect ways of spreading the Gospel. Some of you think that you do enough when you give your money and your interest in order to diffuse it. You can buy a substitute in the militia, but you cannot buy a substitute in Christ's service. You have each some congregation to which you can speak, if it is no larger than Paul's—namely, two people, Aquila and Priscilla. What talks they would have in their lodging, as they plaited the wisps of black hair into rough cloth, and stitched the strips into tents! Aquila was not a Christian when Paul picked him up, but he became one very soon; and it was the preaching in the workshop, amidst the dust, that made him one. If we long to speak about Christ we shall find plenty of people to speak to. 'Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord.'

Now, dear friends, I have only one word more. I have no doubt there are some among us who have been saying, 'This sermon does not apply to me at all.' Does it not? If it does not, what does that mean? It means that you have not the first requisite for spreading the word—viz. personal faith in the word. It means that you have put away, or at least neglected to take in, the word and the Saviour of whom it speaks, into your own lives. But it does *not* mean that you have got rid of the word thereby. It will not in that case lay the grip of which I have been speaking upon you, but it will not let you go. It will lay on you a far more solemn and awful clutch, and like a jailer with his hand on the culprit's shoulder, will 'constrain' you into the presence of the Judge. You can make it a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. And though you do not grasp *it*, it grasps and holds *you*. 'The word that I speak unto him, the same shall judge him at the last day.'

GALLIO

'And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: 15. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.'—ACTS xviii. 14, 15.

THERE is something very touching in the immortality of fame which comes to the men who for a moment pass across the Gospel story, like shooting stars kindled for an instant as they enter our atmosphere. How little Gallio dreamed that he would live for ever in men's mouths by reason of this one judicial dictum! He was Seneca's brother, and was possibly leavened by his philosophy and indisposed to severity. He has been unjustly condemned. There are some striking lessons from the story.

I. The remarkable anticipation of the true doctrine as to the functions of civil magistrates.

Gallio draws a clear distinction between conduct and opinion, and excepts the whole of the latter region from his sway. It is the first case in which the civil authorities refused to take cognisance of a charge against a man on account of his opinions. Nineteen hundred years have not brought all tribunals up to that point yet. Gallio indeed was influenced mainly by philosophic contempt for the trivialities of what he thought a superstition. We are influenced by our recognition of the sanctity of individual conviction, and still more by reverence for truth and by the belief that it should depend only on its own power for progress and on itself for the defeat of its enemies.

II. The tragic mistake about the nature of the Gospel which men make.

There is something very pathetic in the erroneous estimates made by those persons mentioned in Acts who some once or twice come in contact with the preachers of Christ. How little they recognise what was before them! Their responsibility is in better hands than ours. But in Gallio there is a trace of tendencies always in operation.

We see in him the practical man's contempt for mere ideas. The man of affairs, be he statesman or worker, is always apt to think that things are more than thoughts. Gallio, proconsul in Corinth, and his brother official, Pilate, in Jerusalem, both believed in powers that they could see. The question of the one, for an answer to which he did not wait, was not the inquiry of a searcher after truth, but the exclamation of a sceptic who thought all the contradictory answers that rang through the world to be demonstrations that the question had no answer. The impatient refusal of the other to have any concern in settling 'such matters' was steeped in the same characteristically Roman spirit of impatient distrust and suspicion of mere ideas. He believed in Roman force and authority, and thought that such harmless visionaries as Paul and his company might be allowed to go their own way, and he did not know that they carried with them a solvent and constructive power before which the solid-seeming structure of the Empire was destined to crumble, as surely as thick-ribbed ice before the sirocco.

And how many of us believe in wealth and material progress, and regard the region of truth as very shadowy and remote! This is a danger besetting us all. The true forces that sway the world are ideas.

We see in Gallio supercilious indifference to mere 'theological subtleties.' To him Paul's preaching and the Jews' passionate denials of it seemed only a squabble about 'words and names.' Probably he had gathered his impression from Paul's eager accusers, who would charge him with giving the name of 'Christ' to Jesus.

Gallio's attitude was partly Stoical contempt for all superstitions, partly, perhaps, an eclectic belief that all these warring religions were really saying the same thing and differed only in words and names; and partly sheer indifference to the whole subject. Thus Christianity appears to many in this day.

What is it in reality? Not words but power: a Name, indeed, but a Name which is life. Alas for us, who by our jangling have given colour to this misconception!

We see in Gallio the mistake that the Gospel has little relation to conduct. Gallio drew a broad distinction between conduct and opinion, and there he was right. But he imagined that this opinion had nothing to do with conduct, and how wrong he was there we need not elaborate.

The Gospel is the mightiest power for shaping conduct.

III. The ignorant levity with which men pass the crisis of their lives.

How little Gallio knew of what a possibility was opened out before him! Angels were hovering unseen. We seldom recognise the fateful moments of our lives till they are past.

The offer of salvation in Christ is ever a crisis. It may never be repeated. Was Gallio ever again brought into contact with Paul or Paul's Lord? We know not. He passes out of sight, the search-light is turned in another direction, and we lose him in the darkness. The extent of his criminality is in better hands than ours, though we cannot but let our thoughts go forward to the time when he, like us all, will stand at the judgment bar of Jesus, no longer a judge but judged. Let us hope that before he passed hence, he learned how full of spirit and of life the message was, which he once took for a mere squabble about 'words and names,' and thought too trivial to occupy his court. And let us remember that the Jesus, whom we are sometimes tempted to judge as of little importance to us, will one day judge us, and that His judgment will settle our fate for evermore.

TWO FRUITFUL YEARS

'And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, 2. He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. 3. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. 4. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. 7. And all the men were about twelve. 8. And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. 9. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. 10. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. 11. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: 12. So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.'—ACTS xix. 1-12.

THIS passage finds Paul in Ephesus. In the meantime he had paid that city a hasty visit on his way back from

Greece, had left his friends, Aquila and Priscilla, in it, and had gone on to Jerusalem, thence returning to Antioch, and visiting the churches in Asia Minor which he had planted on his former journeys. From the inland and higher districts he has come down to the coast, and established himself in the great city of Ephesus, where the labours of Aquila, and perhaps others, had gathered a small band of disciples. Two points are especially made prominent in this passage—the incorporation of John's disciples with the Church, and the eminent success of Paul's preaching in Ephesus.

The first of these is a very remarkable and, in some respects, puzzling incident. It is tempting to bring it into connection with the immediately preceding narrative as to Apollos. The same stage of spiritual development is presented in these twelve men and in that eloquent Alexandrian. They and he were alike in knowing only of John's baptism; but if they had been Apollos' pupils, they would most probably have been led by him into the fuller light which he received through Priscilla and Aquila. More probably, therefore, they had been John's disciples, independently of Apollos. Their being recognised as 'disciples' is singular, when we consider their very small knowledge of Christian truth; and their not having been previously instructed in its rudiments, if they were associating with the Church, is not less so. But improbable things do happen, and part of the reason for an event being recorded is often its improbability. Luke seems to have been struck by the singular similarity between Apollos and these men, and to have told the story, not only because of its importance but because of its peculiarity.

The first point to note is the fact that these men were disciples. Paul speaks of their having 'believed,' and they were evidently associated with the Church. But the connection must have been loose, for they had not received baptism. Probably there was a fringe of partial converts hanging round each church, and Paul, knowing nothing of the men beyond the fact that he found them along with the others, accepted them as 'disciples.' But there must have been some reason for doubt, or his question would not have been asked. They 'believed' in so far as John had taught the coming of Messiah. But they did not know that Jesus was the Messiah whose coming John had taught.

Paul's question is, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?' Obviously he missed the marks of the Spirit in them, whether we are to suppose that these were miraculous powers or moral and religious elevation. Now this question suggests that the possession of the Holy Spirit is the normal condition of all believers; and that truth cannot be too plainly stated or urgently pressed to-day. He is 'the Spirit, which they that believe on Him' shall 'receive.' The outer methods of His bestowment vary: sometimes He is given after baptism, and sometimes, as to Cornelius, before it; sometimes by laying on of Apostolic hands, sometimes without it. But one thing constantly precedes, namely, faith; and one thing constantly follows faith, namely, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Modern Christianity does not grasp that truth as firmly or make it as prominent as it ought.

The question suggests, though indirectly, that the signs of the Spirit's presence are sadly absent in many professing Christians. Paul asked it in wonder. If he came into modern churches, he would have to ask it once more. Possibly he looked for the visible tokens in powers of miracle-working and the like. But these were temporary accidents, and the permanent manifestations are holiness, consciousness of sonship, God-directed longings, religious illumination, victory over the flesh. These things should be obvious in disciples. They will be, if the Spirit is not quenched. Unless they are, what sign of being Christians do we present?

The answer startles. They had not heard whether the Holy Ghost had been *given*; for that is the true meaning of their reply. John had foretold the coming of One who should baptize with the fire of that divine Spirit. His disciples, therefore, could not be ignorant of the existence thereof; but they had never heard whether their Master's prophecy had been fulfilled. What a glimpse that gives us of the small publicity attained by the story of Jesus!

Paul's second question betrays even more astonishment than did his first. He had taken for granted that, as disciples, the men had been baptized; and his question implies that a pre-requisite of Christian baptism was the teaching which they said that they had not had, and that a consequence of it was the gift of the Spirit, which he saw that they did not possess. Of course Paul's teaching is but summarised here. Its gist was that Jesus was the Messiah whom John had heralded, that John had himself taught that his mission was preliminary, and that therefore his true disciples must advance to faith in Christ.

The teaching was welcomed, for these men were not of the sort who saw in Jesus a rival to John, as others of his disciples did. They became 'disciples indeed,' and then followed baptism, apparently not administered by Paul, and imposition of Paul's hands. The Holy Spirit then came on them, as on the disciples on Pentecost, and 'they spoke with tongues and prophesied.' It was a repetition of that day, as a testimony that the gifts were not limited by time or place, but were the permanent possession of believers, as truly in heathen Ephesus as in Jerusalem; and we miss the meaning of the event unless we add, as truly in Britain to-day as in any past. The fire lit on Pentecost has not died down into grey ashes. If we 'believe,' it will burn on our heads and, better, in our spirits.

Much ingenuity has been expended in finding profound meanings in the number of 'twelve' here. The Apostles and their supernatural gifts, the patriarchs as founders of Israel, have been thought of as explaining the number, as if these men were founders of a new Israel, or Apostolate. But all that is trifling with the story, which gives no hint that the men were of any special importance, and it omits the fact that they were '*about* twelve,' not precisely that number. Luke simply wishes us to learn that there was a group of them, but how many he does not exactly know. More important is it to notice that this is the last reference to John or his disciples in the New Testament. The narrator rejoices to point out that some at least of these were led onwards into full faith.

The other part of the section presents mainly the familiar features of Apostolic ministration, the first appeal to the synagogue, the rejection of the message by it, and then the withdrawal of Paul and the Jewish disciples. The chief characteristics of the narrative are Paul's protracted stay in Ephesus, the establishment of a centre of public evangelising in the lecture hall of a Gentile teacher, the unhindered preaching of the Gospel, and the special miracles accompanying it.

The importance of Ephesus as the eye and heart of proconsular Asia explains the lengthened stay. 'A great door and effectual,' said Paul, 'is opened unto me'; and he was not the man to refrain from pushing in at it because 'there are many adversaries.' Rather opposition was part of his reason for persistence, as it should always be.

There comes a point in the most patient labour, however, when it is best no longer to 'cast pearls' before those who 'trample them under foot,' and Paul set an example of wise withdrawal as well as of brave pertinacity, in leaving the synagogue when his remaining there only hardened disobedient hearts. Note that word *disobedient.* It teaches that the moral element in unbelief is resistance of the will. The two words are not synonyms, though they apply to the same state of mind. Rather the one lays bare the root of the other and declares its guilt. Unbelief comes from disobedience, and therefore is fit subject for punishment. Again observe that expression for Christianity, 'the Way,' which occurs several times in the Acts. The Gospel points the path for us to tread. It is not a body of truth merely, but it is a guide for practice. Discipleship is manifested in conduct. This Gospel points the way through the wilderness to Zion and to rest. It is '*the* Way,' the only path, 'the Way everlasting.'

It was a bold step to gather the disciples in 'the school of Tyrannus.' He was probably a Greek professor of rhetoric or lecturer on philosophy, and Paul may have hired his hall, to the horror, no doubt, of the Rabbis. It was a complete breaking with the synagogue and a bold appeal to the heathen public. Ephesus must have been better governed than Philippi and Lystra, and the Jewish element must have been relatively weaker, to allow of Paul's going on preaching with so much publicity for two years.

Note the flexibility of his methods, his willingness to use even a heathen teacher's school for his work, and the continuous energy of the man. Not on Sabbath days only, but daily, he was at his post. The multitudes of visitors from all parts to the great city supplied a constant stream of listeners, for Ephesus was a centre for the whole country. We may learn from Paul to concentrate work in important centres, not to be squeamish about where we stand to preach the Gospel, and not to be afraid of making ourselves conspicuous. Paul's message hallows the school of Tyrannus; and the school of Tyrannus, where men have been accustomed to go for widely different teaching, is a good place for Paul to give forth his message in.

The 'special miracles' which were wrought are very remarkable, and unlike the usual type of miracles. It does not appear that Paul himself sent the 'handkerchiefs and aprons,' which conveyed healing virtue, but that he simply permitted their use. The converts had faith to believe that such miracles would be wrought, and God honoured the faith. But note how carefully the narrative puts Paul's part in its right place. God 'wrought'; Paul was only the channel. If the eager people, who carried away the garments, had superstitiously fancied that there was virtue in Paul, and had not looked beyond him to God, it is implied that no miracles would have been wrought. But still the cast of these healings is anomalous, and only paralleled by the similar instances in Peter's case.

The principle laid down by Peter (ch. iii. 12) is to be kept in view in the study of all the miracles in the Acts. It is Jesus Christ who works, and not His servants who heal by their 'own power or holiness.' Jesus can heal with or without material channels, but sometimes chooses to employ such vehicles as these, just as on earth He chose to anoint blind eyes with clay, and to send the man to wash it off at the pool. Sense-bound faith is not rejected, but is helped according to its need, that it may be strengthened and elevated.

WOULD-BE EXORCISTS

'. . . Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?'—Acts xix. 15.

THESE exorcists had no personal union with Jesus. To them He was only 'Jesus whom Paul preached.' They spoke His name tentatively, as an experiment, and imitatively. To command 'in the name of Jesus' was an appeal to Jesus to glorify His name and exert His power, and so when the speaker had no real faith in the name or the power, there was no answer, because there was really no appeal.

I. The only power which can cast out the evil spirits is the name of Jesus.

That is a commonplace of Christian belief. But it is often held in a dangerously narrow way and leads to most unwise pitting of the Gospel against other modes of bettering and elevating men, instead of recognising them as allies. Earnest Christian workers are tempted to forget Jesus' own word: 'He that is not against us is for us.' There is no need to disparage other agencies because we believe that it is the Gospel which is 'the power of God unto salvation.' Many of the popular philanthropic movements of the day, many of its curbing and enlightening forces, many of its revolutionary social ideas, are really in their essence and historically in their origin, profoundly Christian, and are the application of the principles inherent in 'the Name' to the evils of society. No doubt many of their eager apostles are non-Christian or even anti-Christian, but though some of them have tried violently to pluck up the plant by the root from the soil in which it first flowered, much of that soil still adheres to it, and it will not live long if torn from its native 'habitat.'

It is not narrowness or hostility to non-Christian efforts to cast out the demons from humanity, but only the declaration of a truth which is taught by the consideration of what is the difference between all other such efforts and Christianity, and is confirmed by experience, if we maintain that, whatever good results may follow from these other influences, it is the powers lodged in the Name of Jesus, and these alone which can, radically and completely, conquer and eject the demons from a single soul, and emancipate society from their tyranny.

For consider that the Gospel which proclaims Jesus as the Saviour is the only thing which deals with the deepest fact in our natures, the fact of sin; gives a personal Deliverer from its power; communicates a new life of which the very essence is righteousness, and which brings with it new motives, new impulses, and new powers.

Contrast with this the inadequate diagnosis of the disease and the consequent imperfection of the remedy which other physicians of the world's sickness present. Most of them only aim at repressing outward acts

None of them touch more than a part of the whole dreadful circumference of the dark orb of evil. Law restrains actions. Ethics proclaims principles which it has no power to realise. It shows men a shining height, but leaves them lame and grovelling in the mire. Education casts out the demon of ignorance, and makes the demons whom it does not cast out more polite and perilous. It brings its own evils in its train. Every kind of crop has weeds which spring with it. The social and political changes, which are eagerly preached now, will do much; but one thing, which is the all-important thing, they will not do, they will not change the nature of the individuals who make up the community. And till that nature is changed any form of society will produce its own growth of evils. A Christless democracy will be as bad as, if not worse than, a Christless monarchy or aristocracy. If the bricks remain the same, it does not much matter into what shape you build them.

These would-be exorcists but irritated the demons by their vain attempts at ejecting them, and it is sometimes the case that efforts to cure social diseases only result in exacerbating them. If one hole in a Dutch dyke is stopped up, more pressure is thrown on another weak point and a leak will soon appear there. There is but one Name that casts a spell over all the ills that flesh is heir to. There is but one Saviour of society—Jesus who saves from sin through His death, and by participation in His life delivers men from that life of self which is the parent of all the evils from which society vainly strives to be delivered by any power but His.

II. That Name must be spoken by believing men if it is to put forth its full power.

These exorcists had no faith. All that they knew of Jesus was that He was the one 'whom Paul preached.' Even the name of Jesus is spoiled and is powerless on the lips of one who repeats it, parrot-like, because he has seen its power when it came flame-like from the fiery lips of some man of earnest convictions.

In all regions, and especially in the matter of art or literature, imitators are poor creatures, and men are quick to detect the difference between the original and the copy. The copyists generally imitate the weak points, and seldom get nearer than the imitation of external and trivial peculiarities. It is more feasible to reproduce the 'contortions of the Sibyl' than to catch her 'inspiration.'

This absence or feebleness of personal faith is the explanation of much failure in so-called Christian work. No doubt there may be other causes for the want of success, but after all allowance is made for these, it still remains true that the chief reason why the Gospel message is often proclaimed without casting out demons is that it is proclaimed with faltering faith, tentatively and without assured confidence in its power, or imitatively, with but little, if any, inward experience of the magic of its spell. The demons have ears quick to discriminate between Paul's fiery accents and the cold repetition of them. Incomparably the most powerful agency which any man can employ in producing conviction in others is the utterance of his own intense conviction. 'If you wish me to weep, your own tears must flow,' said the Roman poet. Other factors may powerfully aid the exorcising power of the word spoken by faith, and no wise man will disparage these, but they are powerless without faith and it is powerful without them.

Consider the effect of that personal faith on the speaker—in bringing all his force to bear on his words; in endowing him for a time with many of the subsidiary qualities which make our words winged and weighty; in lifting to a height of self-oblivion, which itself is magnetic.

Consider its effect on the hearers—how it bows hearts as trees are bent before a rushing wind.

Consider its effect in bringing into action God's own power. Of the man, all aflame with Christian convictions and speaking them with the confidence and urgency which become them and him, it may truly be said, 'It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.'

Here then we have laid bare the secret of success and a cause of failure, in Christian enterprise. Here we see, as in a concrete example, the truth exemplified, which all who long for the emancipation of demon-ridden humanity would be wise to lay to heart, and thereby to be saved from much eager travelling on a road that leads nowhither, and much futile expenditure of effort and sympathy, and many disappointments. It is as true to-day as it was long ago in Ephesus, that the evil spirits 'feel the Infant's hand from far Judea's land,' and are forced to confess, 'Jesus we know and Paul we know'; but to other would-be exorcists their answer is, 'Who are ye?' 'When a strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods are in peace.' There is but 'One stronger than he who can come upon him, and having overcome him, can take from him all his armour wherein he trusted and divide the spoils,' and that is the Christ, at whose name, faithfully spoken, 'the devils fear and fly.'

THE FIGHT WITH WILD BEASTS AT EPHESUS

'After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. 22. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. 23. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. 24. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; 25. Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. 26. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: 27. So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. 28. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. 29. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. 30. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. 31. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. 32. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. 33. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. 34. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.'—ACTS xix. 21-34.

PAUL'S long residence in Ephesus indicates the importance of the position. The great wealthy city was the best possible centre for evangelising all the province of Asia, and that was to a large extent effected during the Apostle's stay there. But he had a wider scheme in his mind. His settled policy was always to fly at the head, as it were. The most populous cities were his favourite fields, and already his thoughts were travelling towards the civilised world's capital, the centre of empire—Rome. A blow struck there would echo through the world. Paul had his plan, and God had His, and Paul's was not realised in the fashion he had meant, but it was realised in substance. He did not expect to enter Rome as a prisoner. God shaped the ends which Paul had only rough-hewn.

The programme in verses 21 and 22 was modified by circumstances, as some people would say; Paul would have said, by God. The riot hastened his departure from Ephesus. He did go to Jerusalem, and he did see Rome, but the chain of events that drew him there seemed to him, at first sight, the thwarting, rather than the fulfilment, of his long-cherished hope. Well it is for us to carry all our schemes to God, and to leave them in His hands.

The account of the riot is singularly vivid and lifelike. It reveals a new phase of antagonism to the Gospel, a kind of trades-union demonstration, quite unlike anything that has met us in the Acts. It gives a glimpse into the civic life of a great city, and shows demagogues and mob to be the same in Ephesus as in England. It has many points of interest for the commentator or scholar, and lessons for all. Luke tells the story with a certain dash of covert irony.

We have, first, the protest of the shrine-makers' guild or trades-union, got up by the skilful manipulation of Demetrius. He was evidently an important man in the trade, probably well-to-do. As his speech shows, he knew exactly how to hit the average mind. The small shrines which he and his fellow-craftsmen made were of various materials, from humble pottery to silver, and were intended for 'votaries to dedicate in the temple,' and represented the goddess Artemis sitting in a niche with her lions beside her. Making these was a flourishing industry, and must have employed a large number of men and much capital. Trade was beginning to be slack, and sales were falling off. No doubt there is exaggeration in Demetrius's rhetoric, but the meeting of the craft would not have been held unless a perceptible effect had been produced by Paul's preaching. Probably Demetrius and the rest were more frightened than hurt; but men are very quick to take alarm when their pockets are threatened.

The speech is a perfect example of how self-interest masquerades in the garb of pure concern for lofty objects, and yet betrays itself. The danger to 'our craft' comes first, and the danger to the 'magnificence' of the goddess second; but the precedence given to the trade is salved over by a 'not only,' which tries to make the religious motive the chief. No doubt Demetrius was a devout worshipper of Artemis, and thought himself influenced by high motives in stirring up the craft. It is natural to be devout or moral or patriotic when it pays to be so. One would not expect a shrine-maker to be easily accessible to the conviction that 'they be no gods which are made with hands.'

Such admixture of zeal for some great cause, with a shrewd eye to profit, is very common, and may deceive us if we are not always watchful. Jehu bragged about his 'zeal for the Lord' when it urged him to secure himself on the throne by murder; and he may have been quite honest in thinking that the impulse was pure, when it was really mingled. How many foremost men in public life everywhere pose as pure patriots, consumed with zeal for national progress, righteousness, etc., when all the while they are chiefly concerned about some private bit of log-rolling of their own! How often in churches there are men professing to be eager for the glory of God, who are, perhaps half-unconsciously, using it as a stalking-horse, behind which they may shoot game for their own larder! A drop of quicksilver oxidises and dims as soon as exposed to the air. The purest motives get a scum on them quickly unless we constantly keep them clear by communion with God.

Demetrius may teach us another lesson. His opposition to Paul was based on the plain fact that, if Paul's teaching prevailed, no more shrines would be wanted. That was a new ground of opposition to the Gospel, resembled only by the motive for the action of the owners of the slave girl at Philippi; but it is a perennial source of antagonism to it. In our cities especially there are many trades which would be wiped out if Christ's laws of life were universally adopted. So all the purveyors of commodities and pleasures which the Gospel forbids a Christian man to use are arrayed against it. We have to make up our minds to face and fight them. A liquor-seller, for instance, is not likely to look complacently on a religion which would bring his 'trade into disrepute'; and there are other occupations which would be gone if Christ were King, and which therefore, by the instinct of self-preservation, are set against the Gospel, unless, so to speak, its teeth are drawn.

According to one reading, the shouts of the craftsmen which told that Demetrius had touched them in the tenderest part, their pockets, was an invocation, 'Great Diana!' not a profession of faith; and we have a more lively picture of an excited crowd if we adopt the alteration. It is easy to get a mob to yell out a watchword, whether religious or political; and the less they understand it, the louder are they likely to roar. In Athanasius' days the rabble of Constantinople made the city ring with cries, degrading the subtlest questions as to the Trinity, and examples of the same sort have not been wanting nearer home. It is criminal to bring such incompetent judges into religious or political or social questions, it is cowardly to be influenced by them. 'The voice of the people' is not always 'the voice of God.' It is better to 'be in the right with two or three' than to swell the howl of Diana's worshippers.

II. A various reading of verse 28 gives an additional particular, which is of course implied in the received text, but makes the narrative more complete and vivid if inserted. It adds that the craftsmen rushed 'into the street,' and there raised their wild cry, which naturally 'filled' the city with confusion. So the howling mob, growing larger and more excited every minute, swept through Ephesus, and made for the theatre, the common place of assembly.

On their road they seem to have come across two of Paul's companions, whom they dragged with them. What they meant to do with the two they had probably not asked themselves. A mob has no plans, and its most savage acts are unpremeditated. Passion let loose is almost sure to end in bloodshed, and the lives of Gaius and Aristarchus hung by a thread. A gust of fury storming over the mob, and a hundred hands might have torn them to atoms, and no man have thought himself their murderer.

What a noble contrast to the raging crowd the silent submission, no doubt accompanied by trustful looks to Heaven and unspoken prayers, presents! And how grandly Paul comes out! He had not been found, probably had not been sought for, by the rioters, whose rage was too blind to search for him, but his brave soul could not bear to leave his friends in peril and not plant himself by their sides. So he 'was minded to enter in unto the people,' well knowing that there he had to face more ferocious 'wild beasts' than if a cageful of lions had been loosed on him. Faith in God and fellowship with Christ lift a soul above fear of death. The noblest kind of courage is not that born of flesh or temperament, or of the madness of battle, but that which springs from calm trust in and absolute surrender to Christ.

Not only did the disciples restrain Paul as feeling that if the shepherd were smitten the sheep would be scattered, but interested friends started up in an unlikely quarter. The 'chief of Asia' or Asiarchs, who sent to dissuade him, 'were the heads of the imperial political-religious organisation of the province, in the worship of "Rome and the emperors"; and their friendly attitude is a proof both that the spirit of the imperial policy was not as yet hostile to the new teaching, and that the educated classes did not share the hostility of the superstitious vulgar' (Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 281). It is probable that, in that time of crumbling faith and religious unrest, the people who knew most about the inside of the established worship believed in it least, and in their hearts agreed with Paul that 'they be no gods which are made with hands.'

So we have in these verses the central picture of calm Christian faith and patient courage, contrasted on the one hand with the ferocity and excitement of heathen fanatical devotees, and on the other with the prudent regard to their own safety of the Asiarchs, who had no such faith in Diana as to lead them to joining the rioters, nor such faith in Paul's message as to lead them to oppose the tumult, or to stand by his side, but contented themselves with *sending* to warn him. Who can doubt that the courage of the

Christians is infinitely nobler than the fury of the mob or the cowardice of the Asiarchs, kindly as they were? If they were his friends, why did they not do something to shield him? 'A plague on such backing!'

III. The scene in the theatre, to which Luke returns in verse 32, is described with a touch of scorn for the crowd, who mostly knew not what had brought them together. One section of it kept characteristically cool and sharp-eyed for their own advantage. A number of Jews had mingled in it, probably intending to fan the flame against the Christians, if they could do it safely. As in so many other cases in Acts, common hatred brought Jew and Gentile together, each pocketing for the time his disgust with the other. The Jews saw their opportunity. Half a dozen cool heads, who know what they want, can often sway a mob as they will. Alexander, whom they 'put forward,' was no doubt going to make a speech disclaiming for the Jews settled in Ephesus any connection with the obnoxious Paul. We may be very sure that his 'defence' was of the former, not of the latter.

But the rioters were in no mood to listen to fine distinctions among the members of a race which they hated so heartily. Paul was a Jew, and this man was a Jew; that was enough. So the roar went up again to Great Diana, and for two long hours the crowd surged and shouted themselves hoarse, Gaius and Aristarchus standing silent all the while and expecting every moment to be their last. The scene reminds one of Baal's priests shrieking to him on Carmel. It is but too true a representation of the wild orgies which stand for worship in all heathen religions. It is but too lively an example of what must always happen when excited crowds are ignorantly stirred by appeals to prejudice or self-interest.

The more democratic the form of government under which we live, the more needful is it to distinguish the voice of the people from the voice of the mob, and to beware of exciting, or being governed by, clamour however loud and long.

PARTING COUNSELS

'And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23. Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. 24. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. 25. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. 26. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. 27. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. 28. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. 29. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. 32. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. 33. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. 34. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.'—ACTS xx. 22-35.

THIS parting address to the Ephesian elders is perfect in simplicity, pathos, and dignity. Love without weakness and fervent yet restrained self-devotion throb in every line. It is personal without egotism, and soars without effort. It is 'Pauline' through and through, and if Luke or some unknown second-century Christian made it, the world has lost the name of a great genius. In reading it, we have to remember the Apostle's long stay in Ephesus, and his firm conviction that he was parting for ever from those over whom he had so long watched, and so long loved, as well as guided. Parting words should be tender and solemn, and these are both in the highest degree.

The prominence given to personal references is very marked and equally natural. The whole address down to verse 27 inclusive is of that nature, and the same theme recurs in verse 31, is caught up again in verse 33, and continues thence to the end. That abundance of allusions to himself is characteristic of the Apostle, even in his letters; much more is it to be looked for in such an outpouring of his heart to trusted friends, seen for the last time. Few religious teachers have ever talked so much of themselves as Paul did, and yet been as free as he is from taint of display or self-absorption.

The personal references in verses 22 to 27 turn on two points—his heroic attitude in prospect of trials and possible martyrdom, and his solemn washing his hands of all responsibility for 'the blood' of those to whom he had declared all the counsel of God. He looks back, and his conscience witnesses that he has discharged his ministry; he looks forward, and is ready for all that may confront him in still discharging it, even to the bloody end.

Nothing tries a man's mettle more than impending evil which is equally certain and undefined. Add that the moment of the sword's falling is unknown, and you have a combination which might shake the firmest nerves. Such a combination fronted Paul now. He told the elders, what we do not otherwise know, that at every halting-place since setting his face towards Jerusalem he had been met by the same prophetic warnings of 'bonds and afflictions' waiting for him.

The warnings were vague, and so the more impressive. Fear has a vivid imagination, and anticipates the worst.

Paul was not afraid, but he would not have been human if he had not recognised the short distance for him between a prison and a scaffold. But the prospect did not turn him a hairsbreadth from his course. True, he was 'bound in the spirit,' which may suggest that he was not so much going joyfully as impelled by a constraint felt to be irresistible. But whatever his feelings, his will was iron, and he went calmly forward on the road, though he knew that behind some turn of it lay in wait, like beasts of prey, dangers of unknown kinds.

And what nerved him thus to front death itself without a quiver? The supreme determination to do what Jesus had given him to do. He knew that his Lord had set him a task, and the one thing needful was to accomplish that. We have no such obstacles in our course as Paul had in his, but the same spirit must mark us if we are to do our work. Consciousness of a mission, fixed determination to carry it out, and consequent contempt of hindrances, belong to all noble lives, and especially to true Christian ones. Perils and hardships and possible evils should have no more power to divert us from the path which Christ marks for us than storms or tossing of the ship have to deflect the needle from pointing north.

It is easy to talk heroically when no foes are in sight; but Paul was looking dangers in the eyes, and felt their breath on his cheeks when he spoke. His longing was to 'fulfil his course.' 'With joy' is a weakening addition. It was not 'joy,' but the discharge of duty, which seemed to him infinitely desirable. What was aspiration at Miletus became fact when, in his last Epistle, he wrote, 'I have finished my course.'

In verses 25 to 27 the Apostle looks back as well as forward. His anticipation that he was parting for ever from the Ephesian elders was probably mistaken, but it naturally leads him to think of the long ministry among them which was now, as he believed, closed. And his retrospect was very different from what most of us, who are teachers, feel that ours must be. It is a solemn thought that if we let either cowardice or love of ease and the good opinion of men hold us back from speaking out all that we know of God's truth, our hands are reddened with the blood of souls.

We are all apt to get into grooves of favourite thoughts, and to teach but part of the whole Gospel. If we do not seek to widen our minds to take in, and our utterances to give forth, all the will of God as seen by us, our limitations and repetitions will repel some from the truth, who might have been won by a completer presentation of it, and their blood will be required at our hands. None of us can reach to the apprehension, in its full extent and due proportion of its parts, of that great gospel; but we may at least seek to come nearer the ideal completeness of a teacher, and try to remember that we are 'pure from the blood of all men,' only when we have not 'shrunk from declaring all God's counsel.' We are not required to know it completely, but we are required not to shrink from declaring it as far as we know it.

Paul's purpose in this retrospect was not only to vindicate himself, but to suggest to the elders their duty. Therefore he passes immediately to exhortation to them, and a forecast of the future of the

Ephesian Church. 'Take heed to yourselves.' The care of one's own soul comes first. He will be of little use to the Church whose own personal religion is not kept warm and deep. All preachers and teachers and men who influence their fellows need to lay to heart this exhortation, especially in these days when calls to outward service are so multiplied. The neglect of it undermines all real usefulness, and is a worm gnawing at the roots of the vines.

We note also the condensed weightiness of the following exhortation, in which solemn reasons are suggested for obeying it. The divine appointment to office, the inclusion of the 'bishops' in the flock, the divine ownership of the flock, and the cost of its purchase, are all focussed on the one point, 'Take heed to all the flock.' Of course a comparison with verse 17 shows that *elder* and *bishop* were two designations for one officer; but the question of the primitive organisation of church offices, important as it is, is less important than the great thoughts as to the relation of the Church to God, and as to the dear price at which men have been won to be truly His.

We note the reading in the Revised Version of v. 28 (margin), 'the flock of the Lord,' but do not discuss it. The chief thought of the verse is that the Church is God's flock, and that the death of Jesus has bought it for His, and that negligent under-shepherds are therefore guilty of grievous sin.

The Apostle had premonitions of the future for the Church as well as for himself, and the horizons were dark in both outlooks. He foresaw evils from two quarters, for 'wolves' would come from without, and perverse teachers would arise within, drawing the disciples after them and away from the Lord. The simile of wolves may be an echo of Christ's warning in Matthew vii. 15. How sadly Paul's anticipations were fulfilled the Epistle to the Church in Ephesus (Revelation ii.) shows too clearly. Unslumbering alertness, as of a sentry in front of the enemy, is needed if the slinking onset of the wolf is to be beaten back. Paul points to his own example, and that in no vainglorious spirit, but to stimulate and also to show how watchfulness is to be carried out. It must be unceasing, patient, tenderly solicitous, and grieving over the falls of others as over personal calamities. If there were more such 'shepherds,' there would be fewer stray sheep.

Anxious forebodings and earnest exhortations naturally end in turning to God and invoking His protecting care. The Apostle's heart runs over in his last words (vs. 32-35). He falls back for himself, in the prospect of having to cease his care of the Church, on the thought that a better Guide will not leave it, and he would comfort the elders as well as himself by the remembrance of God's power to keep them. So Jacob, dying, said, 'I die, but God shall be with you.' So Moses, dying, said, 'The Lord hath said unto me, thou shalt not go over this Jordan. The Lord thy God, He will go before thee.' Not even Paul is indispensable. The under-shepherds die, *the* Shepherd lives, and watches against wolves and dangers. Paul had laid the foundation, and the edifice would not stand unfinished, like some half-reared palace begun by a now dead king. The growth of the Church and of its individual members is sure. It is wrought by God.

His instrument is 'the word of His grace.' Therefore if we would grow, we must use that word. Christian progress is no more possible, if the word of God is not our food, than is an infant's growth if it refuses milk. That building up or growth or advance (for all three metaphors are used, and mean the same thing) has but one natural end, the entrance of each redeemed soul into its own allotment in the true land of promise, the inheritance of those who are sanctified. If we faithfully use that word which tells of and brings God's grace, that we may grow thereby, He will bring us at last to dwell among those who here have growingly been made saints. He is able to do these things. It is for us to yield to His power, and to observe the conditions on which it will work on us.

Even at the close Paul cannot refrain from personal references. He points to his example of absolute disinterestedness, and with a dramatic gesture holds out 'these hands' to show how they are hardened by work. Such a warning against doing God's work for money would not have been his last word, at a time when all hearts were strung up to the highest pitch, unless the danger had been very real. And it is very real to-day. If once the suspicion of being influenced by greed of gain attaches to a Christian worker, his power ebbs away, and his words lose weight and impetus.

It is that danger which Paul is thinking of when he tells the elders that by 'labouring' they 'ought to support the weak'; for by *weak* he means not the poor, but those imperfect disciples who might be repelled or made to stumble by the sight of greed in an elder. Shepherds who obviously cared more for wool than for the sheep have done as much harm as 'grievous wolves.'

Paul quotes an else unrecorded saying of Christ's which, like a sovereign's seal, confirms the subject's words. It gathers into a sentence the very essence of Christian morality. It reveals the inmost secret of the blessedness of the giving God. It is foolishness and paradox to the self-centred life of nature. It is blessedly true in the experience of all who, having received the 'unspeakable gift,' have thereby been enfranchised into the loftier life in which self is dead, and to which it is delight, kindred with God's own blessedness, to impart.

A FULFILLED ASPIRATION

'So that I might finish my course. . . .'—ACTS XX. 24.
'I have finished my course. . . .'—2 TIM. iv. 7.

I DO not suppose that Paul in prison, and within sight of martyrdom, remembered his words at Ephesus. But the fact that what was aspiration whilst he was in the very thick of his difficulties came to be calm retrospect at the close is to me very beautiful and significant. 'So that I may finish my course,' said he wistfully; whilst before him there lay dangers clearly discerned and others that had all the more power over the imagination because they were but dimly discerned—'Not knowing the things that shall befall me there,' said he, but knowing this, that 'bonds and afflictions abide me.' When a man knows exactly what he has to be afraid of he can face it. When he knows a little corner of it, and also knows that there is a great stretch behind that is unknown, that is a state of things that tries his mettle. Many a man will march up to a battery without a tremor who would not face a hole where a snake lay. And so Paul's ignorance, as well as Paul's knowledge, made it very hard for him to say 'None of these things move me' if only 'I might finish my course.'

Now there are in these two passages, thus put together, three points that I touch for a moment. These are, What Paul thought that life chiefly was; what Paul aimed at; and what Paul won thereby.

I. What he thought that life chiefly was.

'That I may finish my course.' Now 'course,' in our modern English, is far too feeble a word to express the Apostle's idea here. It has come to mean with us a quiet sequence or a succession of actions which, taken together, complete a career; but in its original force the English word 'course,' and still more the Greek, of which it is a translation, contain a great deal more than that. If we were to read 'race,' we should get nearer to at least one side of the Apostle's thought. This was the image under which life presented itself to him, as it does to every man that does anything in the world worth doing, whether he be Christian or not—as being not a place for enjoyment, for selfish pursuits, making money, building family, satisfying love, seeking pleasure, or the like; but mainly as being an appointed field for a succession of efforts, all in one direction, and leading progressively to an end. In that image of life as a race, threadbare as it is, there are several grave considerations involved, which it will contribute to the nobleness of our own lives to keep steadily in view.

To begin with, the metaphor regards life as a track or path marked out and to be kept to by us. Paul thought of his life as a racecourse, traced for him by God, and from which it would be perilous and rebellious to diverge. The consciousness of definite duties loomed larger than anything else before him. His first waking thought was, 'What is God's will for me to-day? What stage of the course have I to pass over to-day?' Each moment brought to him an appointed task which at all hazards he must do. And this elevating, humbling, and bracing ever-present sense of responsibility, not merely to circumstances, but to God, is an indispensable part of any life worth the living, and of any on which a man will ever dare to look back.

'My course.' O brethren! if we carried with us, always present, that solemn, severe sense of all-pervading duty and of obligation laid upon us to pursue faithfully the path that is appointed us, there would be less waste, less selfishness, less to regret, and less that weakens and defiles, in the lives of us all. And blessed be His name! however trivial be our tasks, however narrow our spheres, however secular and commonplace our businesses or trades, we may write upon them, as on all sorts of lives, except weak and selfish ones, this inscription, 'Holiness to the Lord.'

The broad arrow stamped on Crown property gives a certain dignity to whatever bears it, and whatever small duty has the name of God written across it is thereby ennobled. If our days are to be full-fraught with the serenity and purity which it is possible for them to attain, and if we ourselves are to put forth all our powers and make the most of ourselves, we must cultivate the continual sense that life is a course—a series of definite duties marked out for us by God.

Again, the image suggests the strenuous efforts needed for discharge of our appointed tasks. The Apostle, like all men of imaginative and sensitive nature, was accustomed to speak in metaphors, which expressed his fervid convictions more adequately than more abstract expressions would have done. That vigorous figure of a 'course' speaks more strongly of the stress of continual effort than many words. It speaks of the straining muscles, and the intense concentration, and the forward-flung body of the runner in the arena. Paul says in effect, 'I, for my part, live at high pressure. I get the most that I can out of myself. I do the very best that is in me.' And that is a pattern for us.

There is nothing to be done unless we are contented to live on the stretch. Easygoing lives are always contemptible lives. A man who never does anything except what he can do easily never comes to do anything greater than what he began with, and never does anything worth doing at all. Effort is the law of life in all departments, as we all of us know and practise in regard to our daily business. But what a strange thing it is that we seem to think that our Christian characters can be formed and perfected upon other conditions, and in other fashions, than those by which men make their daily bread or their worldly fortunes!

The direction which effort takes is different in these two regions. The necessity for concentration and vigorous putting into operation of every faculty is far more imperative in the Christian course than in any other form of life.

I believe most earnestly that we grow Christlike, not by effort only, but by faith. But I believe that there is no faith without effort, and that the growth which comes from faith will not be appropriated and made ours without it. And so I preach, without in the least degree feeling that it impinges upon the great central truth that we are cleansed and perfected by the power of God working upon us, the sister truth that we must 'work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.'

Brethren, unless we are prepared for the dust and heat of the race, we had better not start upon the course. Christian men have an appointed task, and to do it will take all the effort that they can put forth, and will assuredly demand continuous concentration and the summoning of every faculty to its utmost energy.

Still further, there is another idea that lies in the emblem, and that is that the appointed task which thus demands the whole man in vigorous exercise ought in fact to be, and in its nature is, progressive. Is the Christianity of the average church member and professing Christian a continuous advance? Is to-day better than yesterday? Are former attainments continually being left behind? Does it not seem the bitterest irony to talk about the usual life of a Christian as a course? Did you ever see a squad of raw recruits being drilled in the barrack-yard? The first thing the sergeants do is to teach them the 'goose-step,' which consists in lifting up one foot and then the other, *ad infinitum*, and yet always keeping on the same bit of ground. That is the kind of 'course' which hosts of so-called Christians content themselves with running—a vast deal of apparent exercise and no advance. They are just at the same spot at which they stood five, ten, or twenty years ago; not a bit wiser, more like Christ, less like the devil and the world; having gained no more mastery over their characteristic evils; falling into precisely the same faults of temper and conduct as they used to do in the far-away past. By what right can *they* talk of running the Christian race? Progress is essential to real Christian life.

II. Turn now to another thought here, and consider what Paul aimed at.

It is a very easy thing for a man to say, 'I take the discharge of my duty, given to me by Jesus Christ, as my great purpose in life,' when there is nothing in the way to prevent him from carrying out that purpose. But it is a very different thing when, as was the case with Paul, there lie before him the certainties of affliction and bonds, and the possibilities which very soon consolidated themselves into certainties, of a bloody death and that swiftly. To say *then*, without a quickened pulse or a tremor in the eyelid, or a quiver in the voice, or a falter in the resolution, to say then, 'none of these things move me, if only I may do what I was set to do'—that is to be in Christ indeed; and that is the only thing worth living for.

Look how beautifully we see in operation in these heartfelt and few words of the Apostle the power that there is in an absolute devotion to God-enjoined duty, to give a man 'a solemn scorn of ills,' and to lift him high above everything that would bar or hinder his path. Is it not bracing to see any one actuated by such motives as these? And why should they not be motives for us all? The one thing worth our making our aim in life is to accomplish our course.

Now notice that the word in the original here, 'finish,' does not merely mean 'end,' which would be a very poor thing. Time will do that for us all. It will end our course. But an ended course may yet be an unfinished course. And the meaning that the Apostle attaches to the word in both of our texts is not merely to scramble through anyhow, so as to get to the last of it; but to complete, accomplish the course, or, to put away the metaphor, to do all that it was meant by God that he should do.

Now some very early transcriber of the Acts of the Apostles mistook the Apostle's meaning, and thought that he only said that he desired to end his career;

and so, with the best intentions in the world, he inserted, probably on the margin, what he thought was a necessary addition—that unfortunate 'with joy,' which appears in our Authorised Version, but has no place in the true text. If we put it in we necessarily limit the meaning of the word 'finish' to that low, superficial sense which I have already dismissed. If we leave it out we get a far nobler thought. Paul was not thinking about the joy at the end. What he wanted was to do his work, all of it, right through to the very last. He knew there would be joy, but he does not speak about it. What he wanted, as all faithful men do, was to do the work, and let the joy take care of itself.

And so for all of us, the true anæsthetic or 'pain-killer' is that all-dominant sense of obligation and duty which lays hold upon us, and grips us, and makes us, not exactly indifferent to, but very partially conscious of, the sorrows or the hindrances or the pains that may come in our way. You cannot stop an express train by stretching a rope across the line, nor stay the flow of a river with a barrier of straw. And if a man has once yielded himself fully to that great conception of God's will driving him on through life, and prescribing his path for him, it is neither in sorrow nor in joy to arrest his course. They may roll all the golden apples out of the garden of the Hesperides in his path, and he will not stop to pick one of them up; or Satan may block it with his fiercest flames, and the man will go into them, saying, 'When I pass through the fires He will be with me.'

III. Lastly, what Paul won thereby.

'That I *may* finish my course . . . I *have* finished my course'; in the same lofty meaning, not merely *ended*.

though that was true, but 'completed, accomplished, perfected.'

Now some hyper-sensitive people have thought that it was very strange that the Apostle, who was always preaching the imperfection of all human obedience and service, should, at the end of his life, indulge in such a piece of what they fancy was self-complacent retrospect as to say 'I have kept the faith; I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course.' But it was by no means complacent self-righteousness. Of course he did not mean that he looked back upon a career free from faults and flecks and stains. No. There is only one pair of human lips that ever could say, in the full significance of the word, 'It is finished! . . . I have completed the work which Thou gavest Me to do.' Jesus Christ's retrospect of a stainless career, without defect or discordance at any point from the divine ideal, is not repeated in any of His servants' experiences. But, on the other hand, if a man in the middle of his difficulties and his conflict pulls himself habitually together and says to himself, 'Nothing shall move me, so that I may complete this bit of my course,' depend upon it, his effort, his believing effort, will not be in vain; and at the last he will be able to look back on a career which, though stained with many imperfections, and marred with many failures, yet on the whole has realised the divine purpose, though not with absolute completeness, at least sufficiently to enable the faithful servant to feel that all his struggle has not been in vain.

Brethren, no one else can. And oh! how different the two 'courses' of the godly man and the worldling look, in their relative importance, when seen from this side, as we are advancing towards them, and from the other as we look back upon them! Pleasures, escape from pains, ease, comfort, popularity, quiet lives—all these things seem very attractive; and God's will often seems very hard and very repulsive, when we are advancing towards some unwelcome duty. But when we get beyond it and look back, the two careers have changed their characters; and all the joys that could be bought at the price of the smallest neglected duty or the smallest perpetrated sin, dwindle and dwindle and dwindle, and the light is out of them, and they show for what they are—nothings, gilded nothings, painted emptinesses, lies varnished over. And on the other hand, to do right, to discharge the smallest duty, to recognise God's will, and with faithful effort to seek to do it in dependence upon Him, that towers and towers and towers, and there seems to be, as there really is, nothing else worth living for.

So let us live with the continual remembrance in our minds that all which we do has to be passed in review by us once more, from another standpoint, and with another illumination falling upon it. And be sure of this, that the one thing worth looking back upon, and possible to be looked back upon with peace and quietness, is the humble, faithful, continual discharge of our appointed tasks for the dear Lord's sake. If you and I, whilst work and troubles last, do truly say, 'None of these things move me, so that I *might* finish my course,' we too, with all our weaknesses, may be able to say at the last, 'Thanks be to God! I *have* finished my course.'

PARTING WORDS[1]

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace. . . .
—Acts xx. 32.

I may be pardoned if my remarks now should assume somewhat of a more personal character than is my wont. I desire to speak mainly to my own friends, the members of my own congregation; and other friends who have come to give me a parting 'God-speed' will forgive me if my observations have a more special bearing on those with whom I am more immediately connected.

The Apostle whose words I have taken for my text was leaving, as he supposed, for the last time, the representatives of the Church in Ephesus, to whom he had been painting in very sombre colours the dangers of the future and his own forebodings and warnings. Exhortations, prophecies of evil, expressions of anxious solicitude, motions of Christian affection, all culminate in this parting utterance. High above them all rises the thought of the present God, and of the mighty word which in itself, in the absence of all human teachers, had power to 'build them up, and to give them an inheritance amongst them that are sanctified.'

If we think of that Church in Ephesus, this brave confidence of the Apostle's becomes yet more remarkable. They were set in the midst of a focus of heathen superstition, from which they themselves had only recently been rescued. Their knowledge was little, they had no Apostolic teacher to be present with them; they were left alone there to battle with the evils of that corrupt society in which they dwelt. And yet Paul leaves them—'sheep in the midst of wolves,' with a very imperfect Christianity, with no Bible, with no teachers—in the sure confidence that no harm will come to them, because God is with them, and the 'word of His grace' is enough.

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[1] Preached prior to a long absence in Australia.

And that is the feeling, dear brethren, with which I now look you in the face for the last time for a little while. I desire that you and I should together share the conviction that each of us is safe because God and the 'word of His grace' will go and remain with us.

I. So then, first of all, let me point you to the one source of security and enlightenment for the Church and for the individual.

We are not to separate between God and the 'word of His grace,' but rather to suppose that the way by which the Apostle conceived of God as working for the blessing and the guardianship of that little community in Ephesus was mainly, though not exclusively, through that which he here designates 'the word of His grace.' We are not to forget the ever-abiding presence of the indwelling Spirit who guards and keeps the life of the individual and of the community. But what is in the Apostle's mind here is the objective revelation, the actual spoken word (not yet written) which had its origin in God's condescending love, and had for its contents, mainly, the setting forth of that love. Or to put it into other words, the revelation of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, with all the great truths that cluster round and are evolved from it, is the all-sufficient source of enlightenment and security for individuals and for Churches. And whosoever will rightly use and faithfully keep that great word, no evil shall befall him, nor shall he ever make shipwreck of the faith. It is 'able to build you up,' says Paul. In God's Gospel, in the truth concerning Jesus Christ the divine Redeemer, in the principles that flow from that Cross and Passion, and that risen life and that ascension to God, there is all that men need, all that they want for life, all that they want for godliness. The basis of their creed, the sufficient guide for their conduct, the formative powers that will shape into beauty and nobleness their characters, all lie in the germ in this message, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.' Whoever keeps that in mind and memory, ruminates upon it till it becomes the nourishment of his soul, meditates on it till the precepts and the promises and the principles that are enwrapped in it unfold themselves before Him, needs none other guide for life, none other solace in sorrow, none other anchor of hope, none other stay in trial and in death. 'I commend you to God and the word of His grace,' which is a storehouse full of all that we need for life and for godliness. Whoever has it is like a landowner who has a quarry on his estate, from which at will he can dig stones to build his house. If you truly possess and faithfully adhere to this Gospel, you have enough.

Remember that these believers to whom Paul thus spoke had no New Testament, and most of them, I dare say, could not read the Old. There were no written Gospels in existence. The greater part of the New Testament was not written; what was written was in the shape of two or three letters that belonged to Churches in another part of the world altogether. It was to the spoken word that he commended them. How much more securely may we trust one another to that permanent record of the divine revelation which we have here in the pages of Scripture!

As for the individual, so for the Church, that written word is the guarantee for its purity and immortality. Christianity is the only religion that has ever passed through periods of decadence and purified itself again, They used to say that Thames water was the best to put on shipboard because, after it became putrid, it cleared itself and became sweet again. I do not know anything about whether that is true or not, but I know that it is true about Christianity. Over and over again it has rotted, and over and over again it has cleared itself, and it has always been by the one process. Men have gone back to the word and laid hold again of it in its simple omnipotence, and so a decadent Christianity has sprung up again into purity and power. The word of God, the principles of the revelation contained in Christ and recorded for ever in this New Testament, are the guarantee of the Church's immortality and of the Church's purity. This man and that man may fall away, provinces may be lost from the empire for a while, standards of rebellion and heresy may be lifted, but 'the foundation of God standeth sure,' and whoever will hark back again and dig down through the rubbish of human buildings to the living Rock will build secure and dwell at peace. If all our churches were pulverised to-morrow, and every formal creed of Christendom were torn in pieces, and all the institutions of the Church were annihilated—if there was a New Testament left they would all be built up again. 'I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace.'

II. Secondly, notice the possible benefit of the silencing of the *human* voice.

Paul puts together his absence and the power of the word. 'Now I know that you will see my face no more'—'I commend you to God.' That is to say, it is often a good thing that the voice of man may be hushed in order that the sweeter and deeper music of the word of God, sounding from no human lips, may reach our hearts. Of course I am not going to depreciate preachers and books and religious literature and the thought and the acts of good and wise men who have been interpreters of God's meaning and will to their brethren, but the human ministration of the divine word, like every other help to knowing God, may become a hindrance instead of a help; and in all such helps there is a tendency, unless there be continual jealous watchfulness on the part of those who minister them, and on the part of those who use them, to assert themselves instead of leading to God, and to become not mirrors in which we may behold God, but obscuring *media* which come between us and Him. This danger belongs to the great ordinance and office of the Christian ministry, large as its blessings are, just as it belongs to all other offices which are appointed for the purpose of bringing men to God. We may make them ladders or we may make them barriers; we may climb by them or we may remain in them. We may look at the colours on the painted glass until we do not see or think of the light which strikes through the colours.

So it is often a good thing that a human voice which speaks the divine word, should be silenced; just as it is often a good thing that other helps and props should be taken away. No man ever leans all his weight upon God's arm until every other crutch on which he used to lean has been knocked from him.

And therefore, dear brethren, applying these plain things to ourselves, may I not say that it may and should be the result of my temporary absence from you that some of you should be driven to a more first-hand acquaintance with God and with His word? I, like all Christian ministers, have of course my favourite ways of looking at truth, limitations of temperament, and idiosyncrasies of various sorts, which colour the representations that I make of God's great word. All the river cannot run through any pipe; and what does run is sure to taste somewhat of the soil through which it runs. And for some of you, after thirty years of hearing my way of putting things—and I have long since told you all that I have got to say—it will be a good thing to have some one else to speak to you, who will come with other aspects of that great Truth, and look at it from other angles and reflect other hues of its perfect whiteness. So partly because of these limitations of mine, partly because you have grown so accustomed to my voice that the things that I say do not produce half as much effect on many of you as if I were saying them to somebody else, or somebody else were saying them to you, and partly because the affection, born of so many years of united worship, for which in many respects I am your debtor, may lead you to look at the vessel rather than the treasure, do you not think it may be a means of blessing and help to this congregation that I should step aside for a little while and some one else should stand here, and you should be driven to make acquaintance with 'God and the word of His grace' a little more for yourselves? What does it matter though you do not have my sermons? You have your Bibles and you have God's Spirit. And if my silence shall lead any of you to prize and to use *these* more than you have done, then my silence will have done a great deal more than my speech. Ministers are like doctors, the test of their success is that they are not needed any more. And when we can say, 'They can stand without us, and they do not need us,' that is the crown of our ministry.

III. Thirdly, notice the best expression of Christian solicitude and affection.

'I commend you,' says Paul, 'to God, and to the word of His grace.' If we may venture upon a very literal translation of the word, it is, 'I lay you down beside God.' That is beautiful, is it not? Here had Paul been carrying the Ephesian Church on his back for a long time now. He had many cares about them, many forebodings as to their future, knowing very well that after his departure grievous wolves were going to enter in. He says, 'I cannot carry the load any longer; here I lay it down at the Throne, beneath those pure Eyes, and that gentle and strong Hand.' For to commend them to God is in fact a prayer casting the care which Paul could no longer exercise, upon Him.

And that is the highest expression of, as it is the only soothing for, manly Christian solicitude and affection. Of course you and I, looking forward to these six months of absence, have all of us our anxieties about what may be the issue. I may feel afraid lest there should be flagging here, lest good work should be done a little more languidly, lest there should be a beggarly account of empty pews many a time, lest the bonds of Christian union here should be loosened, and when I come back I may find it hard work to reknit them. All these thoughts must be in the mind of a true man who has put most of his life, and as much of himself as during that period he could command, into his work. What then? 'I commend you to God.' You may have your thoughts and anxieties as well as I have mine. Dear brethren, let us make an end of solicitude and turn it into petition and bring one another to God, and leave one another there.

This 'commending,' as it is the highest expression of

Christian solicitude, so it is the highest and most natural expression of Christian affection. I am not going to do what is so easy to do—bring tears at such a moment. I do not purpose to speak of the depth, the sacredness of the bond that unites a great many of us together. I think we can take that for granted without saying any more about it. But, dear brethren, I do want to pledge you and myself to this, that our solicitude and our affection should find voice in prayer, and that when we are parted we may be united, because the eyes of both are turned to the one Throne. There is a reality in prayer. Do you pray for me, as I will for you, when we are far apart. And as the vapour that rises from the southern seas where I go may fall in moisture, refreshing these northern lands, so what rises on one side of the world from believing hearts in loving prayers may fall upon the other in the rain of a divine blessing. 'I commend you to God, and the word of His grace.'

IV. Lastly, notice the parting counsels involved in the commendation.

If it be true that God and His Word are the source of all security and enlightenment, and are so, apart altogether from human agencies, then to commend these brethren to God was exhortation as well as prayer, and implied pointing them to the one source of security that they might cling to that source. I am going to give no advices about little matters of church order and congregational prosperity. These will all come right, if the two main exhortations that are involved in this text are laid to heart; and if they are not laid to heart, then I do not care one rush about the smaller things, of full pews and prosperous subscription lists and Christian work. These are secondary, and they will be consequent if you take these two advices that are couched in my text:—

(*a*) 'Cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart,' as the limpet does to the rock. Cling to Jesus Christ, the revelation of God's grace. And how do we cling to Him? What is the cement of souls? Love and trust; and whoever exercises these in reference to Jesus Christ is built into Him, and belongs to Him, and has a vital unity knitting him with that Lord. Cleave to Christ, brother, by faith and love, by communion and prayer, and by practical conformity of life. For remember that the union which is effected by faith can be broken by sin, and that there will be no reality in our union to Jesus unless it is manifested and perpetuated by righteousness of conduct and character. Two smoothly-ground pieces of glass pressed together will adhere. If there be a speck of sand, microscopic in dimensions, between the two, they will fall apart; and if you let tiny grains of sin come between you and your Master, it is delusion to speak of being knit to Him by faith and love. Keep near Jesus Christ and you will be safe.

(*b*) Cleave to 'the word of His grace.' Try to understand its teachings better; study your Bibles with more earnestness; believe more fully than you have ever done that in that great Gospel there lie every truth that we need and guidance in all circumstances. Bring the principles of Christianity into your daily life; walk by the light of them; and live in the radiance of a present God. And then all these other matters which I have spoken of, which are important, highly important but secondary, will come right.

Many of you, dear brethren, have listened to my voice for long years, and have not done the one thing for which I preach—viz. set your faith, as sinful men, on the great atoning Sacrifice and Incarnate Lord. I beseech you let my last word go deeper than its predecessors, and yield yourselves to God in Christ, bringing all your weakness and all your sin to Him, and trusting yourselves wholly and utterly to His sacrifice and life.

'I commend you to God and to the word of His grace,' and beseech you 'that, whether I come to see you or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.'

THE BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING

'. . . It is more blessed to give than to receive.'—ACTS xx. 35.

How 'many other things Jesus did' and said 'which are not written in this book'! Here is one precious unrecorded word, which was floating down to the ocean of oblivion when Paul drew it to shore and so enriched the world. There is, however, a saying recorded, which is essentially parallel in content though differing in garb, 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.' It is tempting to think that the text gives a glimpse into the deep fountains of the pure blessedness of Jesus Himself, and was a transcript of His own human experience. It helps us to understand how the Man of Sorrows could give as a legacy to His followers 'My joy,' and could speak of it as abiding and full.

I. The reasons on which this saying rests.

It is based not only on the fact that the act of giving has in it a sense of power and of superiority, and that the act of receiving may have a painful consciousness of obligation, though a cynic might endorse it on that ground, but on a truth far deeper than these, that there is a pure and godlike joy in making others blessed.

The foundation on which the axiom rests is that giving is the result of love and self-sacrifice. Whenever they are not found, the giving is not the giving which 'blesses him that gives.' If you give with some *arrière pensée* of what you will get by it, or for the sake of putting some one under obligation, or indifferently as a matter of compulsion or routine, if with your alms there be contempt to which pity is ever near akin, then these are not examples of the giving on which Christ pronounced His benediction. But where the heart is full of deep, real love, and where that love expresses itself by a cheerful act of self-sacrifice, then there is felt a glow of calm blessedness far above the base and greedy joys of self-centred souls who delight only in keeping their possessions, or in using them for themselves. It comes not merely from contemplating the relief or happiness in others of which our gifts may have been the source, but from the working in our own hearts of these two godlike emotions. To be delivered from making myself my great object, and to be delivered from the undue value set upon having and keeping our possessions, are the twin factors of true blessedness. It is heaven on earth to love and to give oneself away.

Then again, the highest joy and noblest use of all our possessions is found in imparting them.

True as to this world's goods.

The old epitaph is profoundly true, which puts into the dead lips the declaration: 'What I kept I lost.

What I gave I kept.' Better to learn that and act on it while living!

True as to truth, and knowledge.

True as to the Gospel of the grace of God.

II. The great example in God of the blessedness of giving.

God gives—gives only—gives always—and He in giving has joy, blessedness. He would not be 'the ever-blessed God' unless He were 'the giving God.' Creation we are perhaps scarcely warranted in affirming to be a necessity to the divine nature, and we run on perilous heights of speculation when we speak of it as contributing to His blessedness; but this at least we may say, that He, in the deep words of the Psalmist, 'delights in mercy.' Before creation was realised in time, the divine Idea of it was eternal, inseparable from His being, and therefore from everlasting He 'rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and His delights were with the sons of men.'

The light and glory thus thrown on His relation to us.

He gives. He does not exact until He has given. He gives what He requires. The requirement is made in love and is itself a 'grace given,' for it permits to God's creatures, in their relation to Him, some feeble portion and shadow of the blessedness which He possesses, by permitting them to bring offerings to His throne, and so to have the joy of giving to Him what He has given to them. 'All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.' Then how this thought puts an end to all manner of slavish notions about God's commands and demands, and about worship, and about merits, or winning heaven by our own works.

Notice that the same emotions which we have found to make the blessedness of giving are those which come into play in the act of receiving spiritual blessings. We receive the Gospel by faith, which assuredly has in it love and self-sacrifice.

Having thus the great Example of all giving in heaven, and the shadow and reflex of that example in our relations to Him on earth, we are thereby fitted for the exemplification of it in our relation to men. To give, not to get, is to be our work, to love, to sacrifice ourselves.

This axiom should regulate Christians' relation to the world, and to each other, in every way. It should shape the Christian use of money. It should shape our use of all which we have.

DRAWING NEARER TO THE STORM

'And it came to pass, that, after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: 2. And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. 3. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. 4. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. 5. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. 6. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. 7. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. 8. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cæsarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. 9. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. 10. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judæa a certain prophet, named Agabus. 11. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. 12. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. 14. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. 15. And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.'—ACTS xxi. 1-15.

PAUL'S heroic persistency in disregarding the warnings of 'bonds and afflictions' which were pealed into his ears in every city, is the main point of interest in this section. But the vivid narrative abounds with details which fill it with life and colour. We may gather it all round three points—the voyage, Tyre, and Cæsarea.

I. The log of the voyage, as given in verses 1-3, shows the leisurely way of navigation in those days and in that sea. Obviously the coaster tied up or anchored in port at night. Running down the coast from Miletus, they stayed overnight, first at the small island of Coos, then stretched across the next day to Rhodes, and on the third struck back to the mainland at Patara, from which, according to one reading, they ran along the coast a little further east to Myra, the usual port of departure for Syria. Ramsay explains that the prevalent favourable wind for a vessel bound for Syria blows steadily in early morning, and dies down towards nightfall, so that there would have been no use in keeping at sea after sundown.

At Patara (or Myra) Paul and his party had to tranship, for their vessel was probably of small tonnage, and only fit to run along the coast. In either port they would have no difficulty in finding some merchantman to take them across to Syria. Accordingly they shifted into one bound for Tyre, and apparently ready to sail. The second part of their voyage took them right out to sea, and their course lay to the west, and then to the south of Cyprus, which Luke mentions as if to remind us of Paul's visit there when he was beginning his missionary work. How much had passed since that day at Paphos (which they might have sighted from the deck)! He had left Paphos with Barnabas and John Mark—where were they? He had sailed away from Cyprus to carry the Gospel among Gentiles; he sails past it, accompanied by a group of these whom he had won for Christ. There he had begun his career; now the omens indicated that possibly its end was near. Many a thought would be in his mind as he looked out over the blue waters and saw the glittering roofs and groves of Paphos.

Tyre was the first port of call, and there the cargo was to be landed. The travellers had to wait till that was done, and probably another one shipped. The seven days' stay is best understood as due to that cause; for we find that Paul re-embarked in the same ship, and went in her as far as Ptolemais, at all events, perhaps to Cæsarea.

We note that no brethren are mentioned as having been met at any of the ports of call, and no evangelistic work as having been done in them. The party were simple passengers, who had to shape their movements to suit the convenience of the master of the vessel, and were only in port at night, and off again next morning early. No doubt the leisure at sea was as restorative to them as it often is to jaded workers now.

II. Tyre was a busy seaport then, and in its large population the few disciples would make but little show. They had to be sought out before they were 'found.' One can feel how eagerly the travellers would search, and how thankfully they would find themselves again among congenial souls. Since Miletus they had had no Christian communion, and the sailors in such a ship as theirs would not be exactly kindred spirits. So that week in Tyre would be a blessed break in the voyage. We hear nothing of visiting the synagogue, nor of preaching to the non-Christian population, nor of instruction to the little Church.

The whole interest of the stay at Tyre is, for Luke, centred on the fact that here too the same message which had met Paul everywhere was repeated to him. It was 'through the Spirit.' Then was Paul flying in the face of divine prohibitions when he held on his way in spite of all that could be said? Certainly not. We have to bring common sense to bear on the interpretation of the words in verse 4, and must suppose that what came from 'the Spirit' was the prediction of persecutions waiting Paul, and that the exhortation to avoid these by keeping clear of Jerusalem was the voice of human affection only. Such a blending of clear insight and of mistaken deductions from it is no strange experience.

No word is said as to the effect of the Tyrian Christians' dissuasion. It had none. Luke mentions it in order to show how continuous was the repetition of the same note, and his silence as to the manner of its reception is eloquent. The parting scene at Tyre is like, and yet very unlike, that at Miletus. In both the Christians accompany Paul to the beach, in both they kneel down and pray. It would scarcely have been a Christian parting without that. In both loving farewells are said, and perhaps waved when words could no longer be heard. But at Tyre, where there were no bonds of old comradeship nor of affection to a spiritual father, there was none of the yearning, clinging love that could not bear to part, none of the hanging on Paul's neck, none of the deep sorrow of final separation. The delicate shades of difference in two scenes so similar tell of the hand of an eye-witness. The touch that 'all' the Tyrian Christians went down to the beach, and took their wives and children with them, suggests that they can have been but a small community, and so confirms the hint given by the use of the word 'found' in verse 4.

III. The vessel ran down the coast to Ptolemais where one day's stop was made, probably to land and ship cargo, if, as is possible, the further journey to Cæsarea was by sea. But it may have been by land; the narrative is silent on that point. At Ptolemais, as at Tyre, there was a little company of disciples, the brevity of the stay with whom, contrasted with the long halt in Cæsarea, rather favours the supposition that the ship's convenience ruled the Apostle's movements till he reached the latter place. There he found a haven of rest, and, surrounded by loving friends, no wonder that the burdened Apostle lingered there before plunging into the storm of which he had had so many warnings.

The eager haste of the earlier part of the journey, contrasted with the delay in Cæsarea at the threshold of his goal, is explained by supposing that at the beginning Paul's one wish had been to get to Jerusalem in time for the Feast, and that at Cæsarea he found that, thanks to his earlier haste and his good passages, he had a margin to spare. He did not wish to get to the Holy City much before the Feast.

Two things only are told as occurring in Cæsarea—the intercourse with Philip and the renewed warnings about going to Jerusalem. Apparently Philip had been in Cæsarea ever since we last heard of him (chap. viii.). He had brought his family there, and settled down in the headquarters of Roman government. He had been used by Christ to carry the Gospel to men outside the Covenant, and for a time it seemed as if he was to be the messenger to the Gentiles; but that mission soon ended, and the honour and toil fell to another. But neither did Philip envy Paul, nor did Paul avoid Philip. The Master has the right to settle what each slave has to do, and whether He sets him to high or low office, it matters not.

Philip might have been contemptuous and jealous of the younger man, who had been nobody when he was chosen as one of the Seven, but had so far outrun him now. But no paltry personal feeling marred the Christian intercourse of the two, and we can imagine how much each had to tell the other, with perhaps Cornelius for a third in company, during the considerably extended stay in Cæsarea. No doubt Luke too made good use of the opportunity of increasing his knowledge of the first days, and probably derived much of the material for the first chapters of Acts from Philip, either then or at his subsequent longer residence in the same city.

We have heard of the prophet Agabus before (chap. xi. 28). Why he is introduced here, as if a stranger, we cannot tell, and it is useless to guess, and absurd to sniff suspicion of genuineness in the peculiarity. His prophecy is more definite than any that preceded it. That is God's way. He makes things clearer as we go on, and warnings more emphatic as danger approaches. The source of the 'afflictions' was now for the first time declared, and the shape which they would take. Jews would deliver Paul to Gentiles, as they had delivered Paul's Master.

But there the curtain falls. What would the Gentiles do with him? That remained unrevealed. Half the tragedy was shown, and then darkness covered the rest. That was more trying to nerves and courage than full disclosure to the very end would have been. Imagination had just enough to work on, and was stimulated to shape out all sorts of horrors. Similarly incomplete and testing to faith are the glimpses of the future which we get in our own lives. We see but a little way ahead, and then the road takes a sharp turn, and we fancy dreadful shapes hiding round the corner.

Paul's courage was unmoved both by Agabus's incomplete prophecy and by the tearful implorings of his companions and of the Cæsarean Christians. His pathetic words to them are misunderstood if we take 'break my heart' in the modern sense of that phrase, for it really means 'to melt away my resolution,' and shows that Paul felt that the passionate grief of his brethren was beginning to do what no fear for himself could do—shake even his steadfast purpose. No more lovely blending of melting tenderness and iron determination has ever been put into words than that cry of his, followed by the great utterance which proclaimed his readiness to bear all things, even death itself, for 'the name of the Lord Jesus.' What kindled and fed that noble flame of self-devotion? The love of Jesus Christ, built on the sense that He had redeemed the soul of His servant, and had thereby bought him for His own.

If we feel that we have been 'bought with a price,' we too, in our small spheres, shall be filled with that ennobling passion of devoted love which will not count life dear if He calls us to give it up. Let us learn from Paul how to blend the utmost gentleness and tender responsiveness to all love with fixed determination to glorify the Name. A strong will and a loving heart make a marvellously beautiful combination, and should both abide in every Christian.

PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

'... We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him.'—ACTS xxi. 8.

THE life of this Philip, as recorded, is a very remarkable one. It is divided into two unequal halves: one full of conspicuous service, one passed in absolute obscurity. Like the moon in its second quarter, part of the disc is shining silver and the rest is invisible. Let us put together the notices of him.

He bears a name which makes it probable that he was not a Palestinian Jew, but one of the many who, of Jewish descent, had lived in Gentile lands and contracted Gentile habits and associations. We first hear of him as one of the Seven who were chosen by the Church, at the suggestion of the Apostles, in order to meet the grumbling of that section of the Church, who were called 'Hellenists,' about their people being neglected in the distribution of alms. He stands in that list next to Stephen, who was obviously the leader. Then after Stephen's persecution, he flies from Jerusalem, like the rest of the Church, and comes down to Samaria and preaches there. He did that because circumstances drove him; he had become one of the Seven because his brethren appointed him, but his next step was in obedience to a specific command of Christ. He went and preached the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch, and then he was borne away from the new convert, and after the Spirit had put him down at Ashdod he had to tramp all the way up the Palestinian coast, left to the guidance of his own wits, until he came to Cæsarea. There he remained for twenty years; and we do not hear a word about him in all that time. But at last Paul and his companions, hurrying to keep the

Feast at Jerusalem, found that they had a little time to spare when they reached Cæsarea, and so they came to 'the house of Philip the evangelist,' whom we last heard of twenty years before, and spent 'many days' with him. That is the final glimpse that we have of Philip.

Now let us try to gather two or three plain lessons, especially those which depend on that remarkable contrast between the first and the second periods of this man's life. There is, first, a brief space of brilliant service, and then there are long years of obscure toil.

I. The brief space of brilliant service.

The Church was in a state of agitation, and there was murmuring going on because, as I have already said, a section of it thought that their poor were unfairly dealt with by the native-born Jews in the Church. And so the Apostles said: 'What is the use of your squabbling thus? Pick out any seven that you like, of the class that considers itself aggrieved, and we will put the distribution of these eleemosynary grants into their hands. That will surely stop your mouths. Do you choose whom you please, and we will confirm your choice.' So the Church selected seven brethren, all apparently belonging to the 'Grecians' or Greek-speaking Jews, as the Apostles had directed that they should be, and one of them, not a Jew by birth, but a 'proselyte of Antioch.' These men's partialities would all be in favour of the class to which they belonged, and to secure fair play for which they were elected by it.

Now these seven are never called 'deacons' in the New Testament, though it is supposed that they were the first holders of that office. It is instructive to note how their office came into existence. It was created by the Apostles, simply as the handiest way of getting over a difficulty. Is that the notion of Church organisation that prevails among some of our brethren who believe that organisation is everything, and that unless a Church has the three orders of bishops, priests, and deacons, it is not worth calling a Church at all? The plain fact is that the Church at the beginning had no organisation. What organisation it had grew up as circumstances required. The only two laws which governed organisation were, first, 'One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren'; and second, 'When the Spirit of the Lord is come upon thee, thou shalt do as occasion shall serve thee.' Thus these seven were appointed to deal with a temporary difficulty and to distribute alms when necessary; and their office dropped when it was no longer required, as was probably the case when, very soon after, the Jerusalem Church was scattered. Then, by degrees, came elders and deacons. People fancy that there is but one rigid, unalterable type of Church organisation, when the reality is that it is fluent and flexible, and that the primitive Church never was meant to be the pattern according to which, in detail, and specifically, other Churches in different circumstances should be constituted. There are great principles which no organisation must break, but if these be kept, the form is a matter of convenience.

That is the first lesson that I take out of this story. Although it has not much to do with Philip himself, still it is worth saying in these days when a particular organisation of the Church is supposed to be essential to Christian fellowship, and we Nonconformists, who have not the 'orders' that some of our brethren seem to think indispensable, are by a considerable school unchurched, because we are without them. But the primitive Church also was without them.

Still further and more important for us, in these brief years of brilliant service I note the spontaneous impulse which sets a Christian man to do Christian work. It was his brethren that picked out Philip, and said, 'Now go and distribute alms,' but his brethren had nothing to do with his next step. He was driven by circumstances out of Jerusalem, and he found himself in Samaria, and perhaps he remembered how Jesus Christ had said, on the day when He went up into Heaven, 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem *and in Samaria*, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.' But whether he remembered that or not, he was here in Samaria, amongst the ancestral enemies of his nation. Nobody told him to preach when he went to Samaria. He had no commission from the Apostles to do so. He did not hold any office in the Church, except that which, according to the Apostles' intention in establishing it, ought to have stopped his mouth from preaching. For they said, when they appointed these seven, 'Let *them* serve tables, and we will give ourselves to the ministry of the word.' But Jesus Christ has a way of upsetting men's restrictions as to the functions of His servants. And so Philip, without a commission, and with many prejudices to stop his mouth, was the first to break through the limitations which confined the message of salvation to the Jews. Because he found himself in Samaria, and they needed Christ there, he did not wait for Peter and James and John to lay their hands upon his head, and say, 'Now you are entitled to speak about Him'; he did not wait for any appointment, but yielded to his own heart, a heart that was full of Jesus Christ, and *must* speak about Him; and he proclaimed the Gospel in that city.

So he has the noble distinction of being the very first Christian man who put a bold foot across the boundary of Judaism, and showed a light to men that were in darkness beyond. Remember he did it as a simple private Christian; uncalled, uncommissioned, unordained by anybody; and he did it because he could not help it, and he never thought to himself, 'I am doing a daring, new thing.' It seemed the most natural thing in the world that he should preach in Samaria. So it would be to us, if we were Christians with the depth of faith and of personal experience which this man had.

There is another lesson that I take from these first busy years of Philip's service. Christ provides wider spheres for men who have been faithful in narrower ones. It was because he had 'won his spurs,' if I may so say, in Samaria, and proved the stuff he was made of, that the angel of the Lord came and said to Philip, 'Go down on the road to Gaza, which is desert. Do not ask now what you are to do when you get there. Go!' So with his sealed orders he went. No doubt he thought to himself, 'Strange that I should be taken from this prosperous work in Samaria, and sent to a desert road, where there is not a single human being!' But he went; and when he struck the point of junction of the road from Samaria with that from Jerusalem, looked about to discover what he had been sent there for. The only thing in sight was one chariot, and he said to himself, 'Ah, that is it,' and he drew near to the chariot, and heard the occupant reading aloud Isaiah's great prophecy. The Ethiopian chamberlain was probably not very familiar with the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which he seems to have been using and, as poor readers often do, helped his comprehension by speaking the words he sees on the page. Philip knew at once that here was the object of his mission, and so 'joined himself to the chariot,' and set himself to his work.

So Christ chooses His agents for further work from those who, out of their own spontaneous love of Him, have done what lay at their hands. 'To him that hath shall be given.' If you are ambitious of a wider sphere, be sure that you fill your narrow one. It will widen quite fast enough for your capacities.

II. Now let me say a word about the long years of obscurity.

Philip went down to Cæsarea, and, as I said, he drops out of the story for twenty years. I wonder why it was that when Jesus Christ desired that Cornelius, who lived in Cæsarea, should hear the gospel, He did not direct him to Philip, who also was in Cæsarea, but bid him send all the way to Joppa to bring Peter thence? I wonder why it was that when Barnabas at Antioch turned his face northwards to seek for young Saul at Tarsus, he never dreamed of turning southwards to call out Philip from Cæsarea? I wonder how it came to pass that this man, who at one time looked as if he was going to be the leader in the extension of the Church to the Gentiles, and who, as a matter of fact, was the first, not only in Samaria but on the desert road, to press beyond the narrow bounds of Judaism, was passed over in the further stages by Jesus, and why his brethren passed him over, and left him there all these years in Cæsarea, whilst there was so much going on that was the continuation and development of the very movement that he had begun. We do not know why, and it is useless to try to speculate, but we may learn lessons from the fact.

Here is a beautiful instance of the contented acceptance of a lot very much less conspicuous, very much less brilliant, than the early beginnings had seemed to promise. I suppose that there are very few of us but have had, back in the far-away past, moments when we seemed to have opening out before us great prospects of service which have never been realised; and the remembrance of the brief moments of dawning splendour is very apt to make the rest of the life look grey and dull, and common things flat, and to make us sour. We look back and we think, 'Ah, the gates were opened for me then, but how they have slammed to since! It is hard for me to go on in this lowly condition, and this eclipsed state into which I have been brought, without feeling how different it might have been if those early days had only continued.' Well, for Philip it was enough that Jesus Christ sent him to the eunuch and did not send him to Cornelius. He took the position that his Master put him in and worked away therein.

And there is a further lesson for us, who, for the most part, have to lead obscure lives. For there was in Philip not only a contented acceptance of an obscure life, but there was a diligent doing of obscure work. Did you notice that one significant little word in the clause that I have taken for my text: 'We entered into the house of Philip *the evangelist*, which was one of the seven'? Luke does not forget Philip's former office, but he dwells rather on what his other office was, twenty years afterwards. He was 'an evangelist now, although the evangelistic work was being done in a very quiet corner, and nobody was paying much attention to it. Time was when he had a great statesman to listen to his words. Time was when a whole city was moved by his teaching. Time was when it looked as if he was going to do the work that Paul did. But all these visions were shattered, and he was left to toil for twenty long years in that obscure corner, and not a soul knew anything about his work except the people to whom it was directed and the four unmarried girls at home whom his example had helped to bring to Jesus Christ, and who were 'prophetesses.' At the end of the twenty years he is 'Philip the evangelist.'

There is patient perseverance at unrecompensed, unrecorded, and unnoticed work. 'Great' and 'small' have nothing to do with the work of Christian people. It does not matter who knows our work or who does not know it, the thing is that *He* knows it. Now the most of us have to do absolutely unnoticed Christian service. Those of us who are in positions like mine have a little more notoriety—and it is no blessing—and a year or two after a man's voice ceases to sound from a pulpit he is forgotten. What does it matter? 'Surely I will never forget any of their works.' And in these advertising days, when publicity seems to be the great good that people in so many cases seek after, and no one is contented to do his little bit of work unless he gets reported in the columns of the newspapers, we may all take example from the behaviour of Philip, and remember the man who began so brilliantly, and for twenty years was hidden, and was 'the evangelist' all the time.

III. Now, there is one last lesson that I would draw, and that is the ultimate recognition of the work and the joyful meeting of the workers.

I think it is very beautiful to see that when Paul entered Philip's house he came into a congenial atmosphere; and although he had been hurrying, out of breath as it were, all the way from Corinth to get to Jerusalem in time for the Feast, he slowed off at once; partly, no doubt, because he found that he was in time, and partly, no doubt, that he felt the congeniality of the society that he met.

So there was no envy in Philip's heart of the younger brother that had so outrun him. He was quite content to share the fate of pioneers, and rejoiced in the junior who had entered into his labour. 'One soweth and another reapeth'; he was prepared for that, and rejoiced to hear about what the Lord had done by his brother, though once he had thought it might have been done by him. How they would talk! How much there would be to tell! How glad the old man would be at the younger man's success!

And there was one sitting by who did not say very much, but had his ears wide open, and his name was Luke. In Philip's long, confidential conversations he no doubt got some of the materials, which have been preserved for us in this book, for his account of the early days of the Church in Jerusalem.

So Philip, after all, was not working in so obscure a corner as he thought. The whole world knows about him. He had been working behind a curtain all the while, and he never knew that 'the beloved physician,' who was listening so eagerly to all he had to tell about the early days, was going to twitch down the curtain and let the whole world see the work that he thought he was doing, all unknown and soon to be forgotten.

And that is what will happen to us all. The curtain will be twitched down, and when it is, it will be good for us if we have the same record to show that this man had—namely, toil for the Master, indifferent to whether men see or do not see; patient labour for Him, coming out of a heart purged of all envy and jealousy of those who have been called to larger and more conspicuous service.

May we not take these many days of quiet converse in Philip's house, when the pioneer and the perfecter of the work talked together, as being a kind of prophetic symbol of the time when all who had a share in the one great and then completed work will have a share in its joy? No matter whether they have dug the foundations or laid the early courses or set the top stone and the shining battlements that crown the structure, they have all their share in the building and their portion in the gladness of the completed edifice, 'that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.'

AN OLD DISCIPLE

'... One Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.'—Acts xxi. 16.

There is something that stimulates the imagination in these mere shadows of men that we meet in the New Testament story. What a strange fate that is to be made immortal by a line in this book—immortal and yet so unknown! We do not hear another word about this host of Paul's, but his name will be familiar to men's ears till the world's end. This figure is drawn in the slightest possible outline, with a couple of hasty strokes of the pencil. But if we take even these few bare words and look at them, feeling that there is a man like ourselves sketched in them, I think we can get a real picture out of them, and that even this dim form crowded into the background of the Apostolic story may have a word or two to say to us.

His name and his birthplace show that he belonged to the same class as Paul, that is, he was a Hellenist, or a Jew by descent, but born on Gentile soil, and speaking Greek. He came from Cyprus, the native island of Barnabas, who may have been a friend of his. He was an 'old disciple,' which does not mean simply that he was advanced in life, but that he was 'a disciple from the beginning,' one of the original group of believers. If we interpret the word strictly, we must suppose him to have been one of the rapidly diminishing nucleus, who thirty years or more ago had seen Christ in the flesh, and been drawn to Him by His own words. Evidently the mention of the early date of his conversion suggests that the number of his contemporaries was becoming few, and that there were a certain honour and distinction conceded by the second generation of the Church to the survivors of the primitive band. Then, of course, as one of the earliest believers, he must, by this time, have been advanced in life. A Cypriote by birth, he had emigrated to, and resided in a village on the road to Jerusalem; and must have had means and heart to exercise a liberal hospitality there. Though a Hellenist like Paul he does not seem to have known the Apostle before, for the most probable rendering of the context is that the disciples from Cæsarea, who were travelling with the Apostle from that place to Jerusalem, 'brought us to Mnason,' implying that this was their first introduction to each other. But though probably unacquainted with the great teacher of the Gentiles—whose ways were looked on with much doubt by many of the Palestinian Chris tians—the old man, relic of the original disciples as he was, had full sympathy with Paul, and opened his house and his heart to receive him. His adhesion to the Apostle would no doubt carry weight with 'the many thousands of Jews which believed, and were all zealous of the law,' and was as honourable to him as it was helpful to Paul.

Now if we put all this together, does not the shadowy figure begin to become more substantial? and does it not preach to us some lessons that we may well take to heart?

I. The first thing which this old disciple says to us out of the misty distance is: Hold fast to your early faith, and to the Christ whom you have known.

Many a year had passed since the days when perhaps the beauty of the Master's own character and the sweetness of His own words had drawn this man to Him. How much had come and gone since then—Calvary and the Resurrection, Olivet and the Pentecost! His own life and mind had changed from buoyant youth to sober old age. His whole feelings and outlook on the world were different. His old friends had mostly gone. James indeed was still there, and Peter and John remained until this present, but most had fallen on sleep. A new generation was rising round about him, and new thoughts and ways were at work. But one thing remained for him what it had been in the old days, and that was Christ. 'One generation cometh and another goeth, but the "Christ" abideth for ever.'

'We all are changed by still degrees;
All but the basis of the soul,'

and the 'basis of the soul,' in the truest sense, is that one God-laid foundation on which whosoever buildeth shall never be confounded, nor ever need to change with changing time. Are we building there? and do we find that life, as it advances, but tightens our hold on Jesus Christ, who is our hope?

There is no fairer nor happier experience than that of the old man who has around him the old loves, the old confidences, and some measure of the old joys. But who can secure that blessed unity in his life if he depend on the love and help of even the dearest, or on the light of any creature for his sunshine? There is but one way of making all our days one, because one love, one hope, one joy, one aim binds them all together, and that is by taking the abiding Christ for ours, and abiding in Him all our days. Holding fast by the early convictions does not mean stiffening in them. There is plenty of room for advancement in Christ. No doubt Mnason, when he was first a disciple, knew but very little of the meaning and worth of his Master and His work, compared with what he had learned in all these years. And our true progress consists, not in growing away from Jesus but in growing up into Him, not in passing through and leaving behind our first convictions of Him as Saviour, but in having these verified by the experience of years, deepened and cleared, unfolded and ordered into a larger, though still incomplete, whole. We may make our whole lives helpful to that advancement and blessed shall we be if the early faith is the faith that brightens till the end, and brightens the end. How beautiful it is to see a man, below whose feet time is crumbling away, holding firmly by the Lord whom he has loved and served all his days, and finding that the pillar of cloud, which guided him while he lived, begins to glow in its heart of fire as the shadows fall, and is a pillar of light to guide him when he comes to die! Dear friends, whether you be near the starting or near the prize of your Christian course, ,cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.' See to it that the 'knowledge of the Father,' which is the 'little children's' possession, passes through the strength of youth, and the 'victory over the world' into the calm knowledge of Him 'that is from the beginning,' wherein the fathers find their earliest convictions deepened and perfected. 'Grow in grace and in the knowledge' of Him, whom to know ever so imperfectly is eternal life, whom to know a little better is the true progress for men, whom to know more and more fully is the growth and gladness and glory of the heavens. Look at this shadowy figure that looks out on us here, and listen to his far-off voice 'exhorting us all that with purpose of heart we should cleave unto the Lord.'

II. But there is another and, as some might think, opposite lesson to be gathered from this outline sketch, namely, The welcome which we should be ready to give to new thoughts and ways.

It is evidently meant that we should note Mnason's position in the Church as significant in regard to his hospitable reception of the Apostle. We can fancy how the little knot of 'original disciples' would be apt to value themselves on their position, especially as time went on, and their ranks were thinned. They would be tempted to suppose that they must needs understand the Master's meaning a great deal better than those who had never known Christ after the flesh; and no doubt they would be inclined to share in the suspicion with which the thorough-going Jewish party in the Church regarded this Paul, who had never seen the Lord. It would have been very natural for this good old man to have said, 'I do not like these new-fangled ways. There was nothing of this sort in my younger days. Is it not likely that we, who were at the beginning of the Gospel, should understand the Gospel and the Church's work without this new man coming to set us right? I am too old to go in with these changes.' All the more honourable is it that he should have been ready with an open house to shelter the great champion of the Gentile Churches; and, as we may reasonably believe, with an open heart to welcome his teaching. Depend on it, it was not every 'old disciple' that would have done as much.

Now does not this flexibility of mind and openness of nature to welcome new ways of work, when united with the persistent constancy in his old creed, make an admirable combination? It is one rare enough at any age, but especially in elderly men. We are always disposed to rend apart what ought never to be separated, the inflexible adherence to a fixed centre of belief, and the freest ranging around the whole changing circumference. The man of strong convictions is apt to grip every trifle of practice and every unimportant bit of his creed with the same tenacity with which he holds its vital heart, and to take obstinacy for firmness, and dogged self-will for faithfulness to truth. The man who welcomes new light, and reaches forward to greet new ways, is apt to delight in having much fluid that ought to be fixed, and to value himself on a 'liberality' which simply means that he has no central truth and no rooted convictions. And as men grow older they stiffen more and more, and have to leave the new work for new hands, and the new thoughts for new brains. That is all in the order of nature, but so much the finer is it when we do see old Christian men who join to their firm grip of the old Gospel the power of welcoming, and at least bidding God-speed to, new thoughts and new workers and new ways of work.

The union of these two characteristics should be consciously aimed at by us all. Hold unchanging, with a grasp that nothing can relax, by Christ our life and our all; but with that tenacity of mind, try to cultivate flexibility too. Love the old, but be ready to welcome the new. Do not invest your own or other people's habits of thought or forms of work with the same sanctity which belongs to the central truths of our salvation; do not let the willingness to entertain new light lead you to tolerate any changes there. It is hard to blend the two virtues together, but they are meant to be complements, not opposites, to each other. The fluttering leaves and bending branches need a firm stem and deep roots. The firm stem looks noblest in its unmoved strength when it is contrasted with a cloud of light foliage dancing in the wind. Try to imitate the persistency and the open mind of that 'old disciple' who was so ready to welcome and entertain the Apostle of the Gentile Churches.

III. But there is still another lesson which, I think, this portrait may suggest, and that is, the beauty that may dwell in an obscure life.

There is nothing to be said about this old man but that he was a disciple. He had done no great thing for his Lord. No teacher or preacher was he. No eloquence or genius was in him. No great heroic deed or piece of saintly endurance is to be recorded of him, but only this, that he had loved and followed Christ all his days.

And is not that record enough? It is his blessed fate to live for ever in the world's memory, with only that one word attached to his name—a disciple.

The world may remember very little about us a year after we are gone. No thought, no deed may be connected with our names but in some narrow circle of loving hearts. There may be no place for us in any record written with a man's pen. But what does that matter, if our names, dear friends, are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, with this for sole epitaph, 'a disciple'? That single phrase is the noblest summary of a life. A thinker? a hero? a great man? a millionaire? No, a 'disciple.' That says all. May it be your epitaph and mine!

What Mnason could do he did. It was not his vocation to go into the 'regions beyond,' like Paul; to guide the Church, like James; to put his remembrances of his Master in a book, like Matthew; to die for Jesus, like Stephen. But he could open his house for Paul and his company, and so take his share in their work. 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' He that with understanding and sympathy welcomes and sustains the prophet, shows thereby that he stands on the same spiritual level, and has the makings of a prophet in him, though he want the intellectual force and may never open his lips to speak the burden of the Lord. Therefore he shall be one in reward as he is in spirit. The old law in Israel is the law for the warfare of Christ's soldiers. 'As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that abideth by the stuff: they shall part alike.' The men in the rear who guard the camp and keep the communications open, may deserve honours, and crosses, and prize-money as much as their comrades who led the charge that cut through the enemy's line and scattered their ranks. It does not matter, so far as the real spiritual worth of the act is concerned, what we do, but only why we do it. All deeds are the same which are done from the same motive and with the same devotion; and He who judges, not by our outward actions but by the springs from which they come, will at last bracket together as equals many who were widely separated here in the form of their service and the apparent magnitude of their work.

'She hath done what she could.' Her power determined the measure and the manner of her work. One precious thing she had, and only one, and she broke her one rich possession that she might pour the fragrant oil over His feet. Therefore her useless deed of utter love and uncalculating self-sacrifice was crowned by praise from His lips whose praise is our highest honour, and the world is still 'filled with the odour of the ointment.'

So this old disciple's hospitality is strangely immortal, and the record of it reminds us that the smallest service done for Jesus is remembered and treasured by Him. Men have spent their lives to win a line in the world's chronicles which are written on sand, and have broken their hearts because they failed; and this passing act of one obscure Christian, in sheltering a little company of travel-stained wayfarers, has made his name a possession for ever. 'Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not'; but let us fill our little corners, doing our unnoticed work for love of our Lord, careless about man's remembrance or praise, because sure of Christ's, whose praise is the only fame, whose remembrance is the highest reward. 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love.'

PAUL IN THE TEMPLE

'And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, 28. Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. 29. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) 30. And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. 31. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. 33. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. 34. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. 35. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. 36. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. 37. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? 38. Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? 39. But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.'—Acts xxi. 27-39.

The stronger a man's faith, the greater will and should be his disposition to conciliate. Paul may seem to have stretched consideration for weak brethren to its utmost, when he consented to the proposal of the Jerusalem elders to join in performing the vow of a Nazarite, and to appear in the Temple for that purpose. But he was quite consistent in so doing; for it was not Jewish ceremonial to which he objected, but the insisting on it as necessary. For himself, he lived as a Jew, except in his freedom of intercourse with Gentiles. No doubt he knew that the death-warrant of Jewish ceremonial had been signed, but he could leave it to time to carry out the sentence. The one thing which he was resolved should not be was its imposition on Gentile Christians. Their road to Jesus was not through Temple or synagogue. As for Jewish Christians, let them keep to the ritual if they chose. The conciliatory plan recommended by the elders, though perfectly consistent with Paul's views and successful with the Jewish Christians, roused non-Christian Jews as might have been expected.

This incident brings out very strikingly the part played by each of the two factors in carrying out God's purposes for Paul. They are unconscious instruments, and co-operation is the last thing dreamed of on either side; but Jew and Roman together work out a design of which they had not a glimpse.

I. Note the charge against Paul. The 'Jews from Asia' knew him by sight, as they had seen him in Ephesus and elsewhere; and possibly some of them had been fellow-passengers with him from Miletus. No wonder that they construed his presence in the Temple into an insult to it. If Luther or John Knox had appeared in St. Peter's, he would not have been thought to have come as a worshipper. Paul's teaching may very naturally have created the impression in hot-tempered partisans, who could not draw distinctions, that he was the enemy of Temple and sacrifice.

It has always been the vice of religious controversy to treat inferences from heretical teaching, which appear plain to the critics, as if they were articles of the heretic's belief. These Jewish zealots practised a very common method when they fathered on Paul all which they supposed to be involved in his position. Their charges against him are partly flat lies, partly conclusions drawn from misapprehension of his position.

partly exaggeration, and partly hasty assumptions. He had never said a word which could be construed as 'against the people.' He had indeed preached that the law was not for Gentiles, and was not the perfect revelation which brought salvation, and he had pointed to Jesus as in Himself realising all that the Temple shadowed; but such teaching was not 'against' either, but rather for both, as setting both in their true relation to the whole process of revelation. He had not brought 'Greeks' into the Temple, not even the one Greek whom malice multiplied into many. When passion is roused, exaggerations and assumptions soon become definite assertions. The charges are a complete object-lesson in the baser arts of religious (!) partisans; and they have been but too faithfully reproduced in all ages. Did Paul remember how he had been 'consenting' to the death of Stephen on the very same charges? How far he has travelled since that day!

II. Note the immediately kindled flame of popular bigotry. The always inflammable population of Jerusalem was more than usually excitable at the times of the Feasts, when it was largely increased by zealous worshippers from a distance. Noble teaching would have left the mob as stolid as it found them; but an appeal to the narrow prejudices which they thought were religion was a spark in gunpowder, and an explosion was immediate. It is always easier to rouse men to fight for their 'religion' than to live by it. Jehu was proud of what he calls his 'zeal for the Lord,' which was really only ferocity with a mask on. The yelling crowd did not stop to have the charges proved. That they were made was enough. In Scotland people used to talk of 'Jeddart justice,' which consisted in hanging a man first, and trying him leisurely afterwards. It was usually substantially just when applied to moss-troopers, but does not do so well when administered to Apostles.

Notice the carefulness to save the Temple from pollution, which is shown by the furious crowds dragging Paul outside before they kill him. They were not afraid to commit murder, but they were horror-struck at the thought of a breach of ceremonial etiquette. Of course! for when religion is conceived of as mainly a matter of outward observances, sin is reduced to a breach of these. We are all tempted to shift the centre of gravity in our religion, and to make too much of ritual etiquette. Kill Paul if you will, but get him outside the sacred precincts first. The priests shut the doors to make sure that there should be no profanation, and stopped inside the Temple, well pleased that murder should go on at its threshold. They had better have rescued the victim. Time was when the altar was a sanctuary for the criminal who could grasp its horns, but now its ministers wink at bloodshed with secret approval. Paul could easily have been killed in the crowd, and no responsibility for his death have clung to any single hand. No doubt that was the cowardly calculation which they made, and they were well on the way to carry it out when the other factor comes into operation.

III. Note the source of deliverance. The Roman garrison was posted in the fortress of Antonia, which commanded the Temple from a higher level at the north-west angle of the enclosure. Tidings 'came *up*' to the officer in command, Claudius Lysias by name (Acts xxiii. 26), that all Jerusalem was in confusion. With disciplined promptitude he turned out a detachment and 'ran down upon them.' The contrast between the quiet power of the legionaries and the noisy feebleness of the mob is striking. The best qualities of Roman sway are seen in this tribune's unhesitating action, before which the excited mob cowers in fright. They 'left beating of Paul,' as knowing that a heavier hand would fall on them for rioting. With swift decision Lysias acts first and talks afterwards, securing the man who was plainly the centre of disturbance, and then having got him fast with two chains on him, inquiring who he was, and what he had been doing.

Then the crowd breaks loose again in noisy and contradictory explanations, all at the top of their voices, and each drowning the other. Clearly the bulk of them could not answer either of Lysias' questions, though they could all bellow 'Away with him!' till their throats were sore. It is a perfect picture of a mob, which is always ferocious and volubly explanatory in proportion to its ignorance. One man kept his head in the hubbub, and that was Lysias, who determined to hold his prisoner till he did know something about him. So he ordered him to be taken up into the castle; and as the crowd saw their prey escaping they made one last fierce rush, and almost swept away the soldiers, who had to pick Paul up and carry him. Once on the stairs leading to the castle they were clear of the crowd, which could only send a roar of baffled rage after them, and to this the stolid legionaries were as deaf as were their own helmets.

The part here played by the Roman authority is that which it performs throughout the Acts. It shields infant Christianity from Jewish assailants, like the wolf which, according to legend, suckled Romulus. The good and the bad features of Roman rule were both valuable for that purpose. Its contempt for ideas, and above all for speculative differences in a religion which it regarded as a hurtful superstition, its unsympathetic incapacity for understanding its subject nations, its military discipline, its justice, which though often tainted was yet better than the partisan violence which it coerced, all helped to make it the defender of the first Christians. Strange that Rome should shelter and Jerusalem persecute!

Mark, too, how blindly men fulfil God's purposes. The two bitter antagonists, Jew and Roman, seem to themselves to be working in direct opposition; but God is using them both to carry out His design. Paul has to be got to Rome, and these two forces are combined by a wisdom beyond their ken, to carry him thither. Two cogged wheels turning in opposite directions fit into each other, and grind out a resultant motion, different from either of theirs. These soldiers and that mob were like pawns on a chessboard, ignorant of the intentions of the hand which moves them.

IV. Note the calm courage of Paul. He too had kept his head, and though bruised and hustled, and having but a minute or two beforehand looked death in the face, he is ready to seize the opportunity to speak a word for his Master. Observe the quiet courtesy of his address, and his calm remembrance of the tribune's right to prevent his speaking. There is nothing more striking in Paul's character than his self-command and composure in all circumstances. This ship could rise to any wave, and ride in any storm. It was not by virtue of happy temperament but of a fixed faith that his heart and mind were kept in perfect peace. It is not easy to disturb a man who counts not his life dear if only he may complete his course. So these two men front each other, and it is hard to tell which has the quieter pulse and the steadier hand. The same sources of tranquil self-control and calm superiority to fortune which stood Paul in such good stead are open to us. If God is our rock and our high tower we shall not be moved.

The tribune had for some unknown reason settled in his mind that the Apostle was a well-known 'Egyptian,' who had headed a band of 'Sicarii' or 'dagger-men,' of whose bloody doings Josephus tells us. How the Jews should have been trying to murder such a man Lysias does not seem to have considered. But when he heard the courteous, respectful Greek speech of the Apostle he saw at once that he had got no uncultured ruffian to deal with, and in answer to Paul's request and explanation gave him leave to speak. That has been thought an improbability. But strong men recognise each other, and the brave Roman was struck with something in the tone and bearing of the brave Jew which made him instinctively sure that no harm would come of the permission. There ought to be that in the demeanour of a Christian which is as a testimonial of character for him, and sways observers to favourable constructions.

PAUL ON HIS OWN CONVERSION

'And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. 7. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? 8. And I answered, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. 9. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me. 10. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. 11. And when I could not see for

the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. 12. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, 13. Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. 14. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. 15. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. 16. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'—Acts xxii. 6-16.

We follow Paul's example when we put Jesus' appearance to him from heaven in a line with His appearances to the disciples on earth. 'Last of all, He appeared to me also.' But it does not follow that the appearances are all of the same kind, or that Paul thought that they were. They were all equally real, equally 'objective,' equally valid proofs of Jesus' risen life. On two critical occasions Paul told the story of Jesus' appearance as his best 'Apologia.' 'I saw and heard Him, and that revolutionised my life, and made me what I am.' The two accounts are varied, as the hearers were, but the differences are easily reconciled, and the broad facts are the same in both versions, and in Luke's rendering in chapter ix.

A favourite theory in some quarters is that Paul's conversion was not sudden, but that misgivings had been working in him ever since Stephen's death. Surely that view is clean against facts. Persecuting its adherents to the death is a strange result of dawning belief in 'this way.' Paul may be supposed to have known his state of mind as well as a critic nineteen centuries off does, and he had no doubt that he set out from Jerusalem a bitter hater of the convicted impostor Jesus, and stumbled into Damascus a convinced disciple because he had seen and heard Him. That is his account of the matter, which would not have been meddled with if the meddlers had not taken offence at 'the supernatural element.' We note the emphasis which Paul puts on the suddenness of the appearance, implying that the light burst all in a moment. A little bit of personal reminiscence comes up in his specifying the time as 'about noon,' the brightest hour. He remembers how the light outblazed even the blinding brilliance of a Syrian noontide. He insists too on the fact that his senses were addressed, both eye and ear. He saw the glory of that light, and heard the voice. He does not say here that he saw Jesus, but that he did so is clear from Ananias' words, 'to see the Righteous One' (ver. 14), and from 1 Corinthians xv. 8. Further, he makes it very emphatic that the vision was certified as no morbid fancy of his own, but yet was marked as meant for him only, by the double fact that his companions did share in it, but only in part. They did see the light, but not 'the Righteous One'; they did hear the sound of the voice, but not so as to know what it said. The difference between merely hearing a noise and discerning the sense of the words is probably marked by the construction in the Greek, and is certainly to be understood.

The blaze struck all the company to the ground (Acts xxvi. 14). Prone on the earth, and probably with closed eyes, their leader heard his own name twice sounded, with appeal, authority, and love in the tones. The startling question which followed not only pierced conscience, and called for a reasonable vindication of his action, but flashed a new light on it as being persecution which struck at this unknown heavenly speaker. So the first thought in Saul's mind is not about himself or his doings but about the identity of that Speaker. Awe, if not actual worship, is expressed in addressing Him as Lord. Wonder, with perhaps some foreboding of what the answer would be, is audible in the question, 'Who art Thou?' Who can imagine the shock of the answer to Saul's mind? Then the man whom he had thought of as a vile apostate, justly crucified and not risen as his dupes dreamed, lived in heaven, knew him, Saul, and all that he had been doing, was 'apparelled in celestial light,' and yet in heavenly glory was so closely identified with these poor people whom he had been hunting to death that to strike them was to hurt Him! A bombshell had burst, shattering the foundation of his fortifications. A deluge had swept away the ground on which he had stood. His whole life was revolutionised. Its most solid elements were dissolved into vapour, and what he had thought misty nonsense was now the solid thing. To find a 'why' for his persecuting was impossible, unless he had said (what in effect he did say), 'I did it ignorantly.' When a man has a glimpse of Jesus exalted to heaven, and is summoned by Him to give a reason for his life of alienation, that life looks very different from what it did, when seen by dimmer light. Clothes are passable by candle-light that look very shabby in sunshine. When Jesus comes to us, His first work is to set us to judge our past, and no man can muster up respectable answers to His question, 'Why?' for all sin is unreasonable, and nothing but obedience to Him can vindicate itself in His sight.

Saul threw down his arms at once. His characteristic impetuosity and eagerness to carry out his convictions impelled him to a surrender as complete as his opposition. The test of true belief in the ascended Jesus is to submit the will to Him, to be chiefly desirous of knowing His will, and ready to do it. 'Who art Thou, Lord?' should be followed by 'What shall I do, Lord?'

Blind Saul, led by the hand into the city which he had expected to enter so differently, saw better than ever before. 'The glory of that light' blinds us to things seen, but makes us able to see afar off the only realities, the things unseen. Speaking to Jews, as here, Paul described Ananias as a devout adherent of the law, in order to conciliate them and to suggest his great principle that a Christian was not an apostate but a complete Jew. To Agrippa he drops all reference to Ananias as irrelevant, and throws together the words on the road and the commission received through Ananias as equally Christ's voice. Here he lays stress on his agency in restoring sight, and on his message as including two points—that it was 'the God of our fathers' who had 'appointed' the vision, and that the purpose of the vision was to make Saul a witness to all men. The bearing of this on the conciliatory aim of the discourse is plain. We note also the precedence given in the statement of the particulars of the vision to 'knowing his will'—that was the end for which the light and the voice were given. Observe too how the twofold evidence of sense is signalised, both in the reference to seeing the Righteous One and to hearing His voice and in the commission to witness what Saul had seen and heard. The personal knowledge of Jesus, however attained, constitutes the qualification and the obligation to be His witness. And the convincing testimony is when we can say, as we all can say if we are Christ's, 'That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that . . . declare we unto you.'

ROME PROTECTS PAUL

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the Temple, I was in a trance; 18. And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me. 19. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee: 20. And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. 21. And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. 22. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. 23. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, 24. The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. 25. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? 26. When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. 27. Then the chief captain came, and said, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. 28. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. 29. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. 30. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.'—ACTS xxii. 17-30.

THE threatened storm soon burst on Paul in Jerusalem. On the third day after his arrival he began the ceremonial recommended by the elders to prove his adherence to the law. Before the seven days during which it lasted were over the riot broke out, and he was saved from death only by the military tribune hurrying down to the Temple and dragging him from the mob.

The tribune's only care was to stamp out a riot, and whether the victim was 'that Egyptian' or not, to prevent his being murdered. He knew nothing, and cared as little, about the grounds of the tumult, but he was not going to let a crowd of turbulent Jews take the law into their own hands, and flout the majesty of Roman justice. So he lets the nearly murdered man say his say and keeps the mob off him. It was a strange scene—below, the howling zealots; above, on the stairs, the Christian apologist, guarded from his countrymen by a detachment of legionaries; and the assembly presided over by a Roman tribune.

It is very characteristic of Paul that he thought that his own conversion was the best argument that he could use with his fellow-Israelites. So he tells his story, and this section strikes into his speech at the point where he is coming to very thin ice indeed, and is about to vindicate his work among the Gentiles by declaring that it was done in obedience to a command from heaven. We need not discuss the date of the trance, whether it was in his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion or, as Ramsay strongly argues, is to be put at the visit mentioned in Acts xi. 30 and xii. 25.

We note the delicate, conciliatory skill with which he brings out that his conversion had not made him less a devout worshipper in the Temple, by specifying it as the scene of the trance, and prayer as his occupation then. The mention of the Temple also invested the vision with sanctity.

Very noticeable too is the avoidance of the name of Jesus, which would have stirred passion in the crowd. We may also observe that the first words of our Lord, as given by Paul, did not tell him whither he was to go, but simply bade him leave Jerusalem. The full announcement of the mission to the Gentiles was delayed both by Jesus to Paul and by Paul to his brethren. He was to 'get quickly out of Jerusalem'; that was tragic enough. He was to give up working for his own people, whom he loved so well. And the reason was their rooted incredulity and their hatred of him. Other preachers might do something with them, but Paul could not. 'They will not receive testimony of *thee.*'

But the Apostle's heart clung to his nation, and not even his Lord's command was accepted without remonstrance. His patriotism led him to the verge of disobedience, and encouraged him to put in his 'But, Lord,' with boldness that was all but presumption. He ventures to suggest a reason why the Jews *would*, as he thinks, receive his testimony. They knew what he had been, and they must bethink themselves that there must be something real and mighty in the power which had turned his whole way of thinking and living right round, and made him love all that he had hated, and count all that he had prized 'but dung.' The remonstrance is like Moses', like Jeremiah's, like that of many a Christian set to work that goes against the grain, and called to relinquish what he would fain do, and do what he would rather leave undone.

But Jesus does not take His servants' remonstrances amiss, if only they will make them frankly to Him, and not keep muttering them under their breath to themselves. Let us say all that is in our hearts. He will listen, and clear away hesitations, and show us our path, and make us willing to walk in it. Jesus did not discuss the matter with Paul, but reiterated the command, and made it more pointed and clear; and then Paul stopped objecting and yielded his will, as we should do. 'When he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.' The Apostle had kept from the obnoxious word as long as he could, but it had to come, and he tells the enraged listeners at last, without circumlocution, that he is the Apostle of the Gentiles, that Jesus has made him so against his will, and that therefore he must do the work appointed him, though his heart-strings crack with seeming to be cold to Israel.

The burst of fury, expressed in gestures which anybody who has ever seen two Easterns quarrelling can understand, looks fitter for a madhouse than an audience of men in their senses. They yelled and tore their garments (and their beards, no doubt), and clutched handfuls of dust and tossed it in the air, like Shimei cursing David. What a picture of frenzied hate! And what was it all for? Because Gentiles were to be allowed to share in Israel's privileges. And what were the privileges which they thus jealously monopolised? The favour and protection of the God who, as their own prophets had taught them, was the God of the whole earth, and revealed Him to Israel that Israel might reveal Him to the world.

The less they entered into the true possession of their heritage, the more savagely they resented sharing it with the nations. The more their prerogative became a mere outward thing, the more they snarled at any one who proposed to participate in it. To seek to keep religious blessings to one's self is a conclusive proof that they are not really possessed. If we have them we shall long to impart them. Formal religionists always dislike missionary enterprise.

The tribune no doubt had been standing silently watching, in his strong, contemptuous Roman way, the paroxysm of rage sweeping over his troublesome charge. Of course he did not understand a word that the culprit had been saying, and could not make out what had produced the outburst. He felt that there was something here that he had not fathomed, and that he must get to the bottom of. It was useless to lay hold of any of these shrieking maniacs and try to get a reasonable word out of them. So he determined to see what he could make of the orator, who had already astonished him by traces of superior education, and was evidently no mere vulgar firebrand or sedition-monger. He might have tried gentler means of extracting the truth than scourging, but that process of 'examination,' as it is flatteringly called, was common, and has not been antiquated for so many centuries that we need wonder at this Roman officer using it.

Paul submitted, and was already tied up to some whipping-post, in an attitude which would expose his back to the lash, when he quietly dropped, to the inferior officer detailed to superintend the flogging, the question which fell like a bombshell. Possibly the Apostle had not known what the soldiers were ordered to do with him till he was tied up. We cannot tell why he did not plead his citizenship sooner. But we may remember that at Philippi he did not plead it at all till after the scourging. Why he delayed so long in the present instance, and why he at last spoke the magic words, 'I am a Roman citizen,' we cannot say. But we may gather the two lessons that Christ's servants are often wise in submitting silently to wrongs, and that they are within their rights in availing themselves of legal defences against illegal treatment. Whether silence or protest is the more expedient must be determined in each case by conscience, guided by the sought-for guidance of the enlightening Spirit. The determining consideration should be, Which course will best glorify my Master?

The information brought the tribune in haste to the place where the Apostle was still tied up. The tables were turned indeed. His brief answer, 'Yea,' was accepted at once, for to claim the sacred name of Roman falsely would have been too dangerous, and no doubt Paul's bearing impressed the tribune with a conviction of his truthfulness. A hint of contempt and doubt lies in his remark that he had paid dearly for the franchise, which remark implies, 'Where did a poor man like you get the money then?' A shameful trade in selling citizens' rights was carried on in the degraded days of the Empire by underlings at court, and no doubt the tribune had procured his citizenship in that way. Paul's answer explains that he was born free, and so was above his questioner.

That discovery put an end to all thought of scourging. Paul was at once liberated, and the tribune, terrified that he might be reported, seeks to repair his error and changes his tactics, retaining Paul for safety in the castle, and summoning the Sanhedrim, to try to find out more of this strange affair through them. The great council of the nation had sunk low indeed when it had to obey the call of a Roman soldier.

Thus once more, as so continually in the Acts, Rome is friendly to the Christian teachers and saves them from Jewish fury. To point out that early protection and benevolent sufferance is one purpose of the whole book. The days of Roman persecution had not yet come. The Empire was favourable to Christianity, not only because its officials were too proud to take interest in petty squabbles between two sects of Jews about their absurd superstitions, but reasons of political wisdom combined with supercilious indifference to bring about this attitude.

The strong hand of Rome, too, if it crushed national independence, also suppressed violence, kept men from flying at each other's throats, spread peace over wide lands, and made the journeyings of Paul and the planting of the early Christian Churches possible. It was a God-appointed, though an imperfect, and in some aspects, mischievous unity, and prepared the way for that higher form of unity realised in the Church which finally shattered the coarser Empire which had at first sheltered it. The Cæsars were doing God's work when they were following their own lust of empire. They were yoked to Christ's chariot, though unwitting and unwilling. To them, as truly as to Cyrus, might the divine voice have said, 'I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me.'

CHRIST'S WITNESSES

'And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.'—ACTS xxiii. 11.

IT had long been Paul's ambition to 'preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also.' His settled policy, as shown by this Book of the Acts, was to fly at the head, to attack the great centres of population. We trace him from Antioch to Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus; and of course Rome was the goal, where a blow struck at the heart might reverberate through the empire. So he had planned for it, and prayed about it, and thought about it, and spoken about it. But his wish was accomplished, as our prayers and purposes so often are, in a manner very strange to him. A popular riot in Jerusalem, a half-friendly arrest by the contemptuous impartiality of a Roman officer, a final rejection by the Sanhedrim, a prison in Cæsarea, an appeal to Cæsar, a weary voyage, a shipwreck: this was the chain of circumstances which fulfilled his desire, and brought him to the imperial city.

My text comes at the crisis of his fate. He has just been rejected by his people, and for the moment is in safety in the castle under the charge of the Roman garrison. One can fancy how, as he lay there in the barrack that night, he felt that he had come to a turning-point; and the thoughts were busy in his mind, 'Is this for life or for death? Am I to do any more work for Christ, or am I silenced for ever?' —'And the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer, Paul!' The divine message assured him that he should live; it testified of Christ's approbation of his past, and promised him that, in recompense for that past, he should have wider work to do. So he passed to the unknown future quietly; and went on his way with the Master by his side.

Now, dear friends, it seems to me that in these great words there lie lessons applying to all Christian people as truly, though in different fashion, as they did to the Apostle, and having an especial bearing on that great enterprise of Christian missions, with which I would connect them in this sermon. I desire, then, to draw out the lessons which seem to me to lie under the surface of this great promise.

I. To live ought to be, for a Christian, to witness.

The promise in form is a promise of continued testimony-bearing; in its substance, one might say, it is a promise of continued life. Paul is cheered, not by being told that the wrath of the enemy will launch itself at his head in vain, and that he will bear a charmed life through it all, but by being told that there is work for him to do yet. That is the shape in which the promise of life is held out to him. So it always ought to be; a Christian man's life ought to be one continuous witnessing for that Lord Christ who stood by the Apostle in the castle at Jerusalem.

Let me just urge this upon you for a few moments. It seems to me that to raise up witnesses for Himself is, in one aspect, the very purpose of all Christ's work. You and I, dear brethren, if we have any living hold of that Lord, have received Him into our hearts, not only in order that for ourselves we may rejoice in Him, but in order that, for ourselves rejoicing in Him, we may 'show forth the virtues of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.' There is no creature so great as that he is not regarded as a means to a further end; and there is no creature so small but that he has the right to claim happiness and blessing from the Hand that made him. Jesus Christ has drawn us to Himself, that we may know the sweetness of His presence, the cleansing of His blood, the stirring and impulse of His indwelling life in us for our own joy and our own completion, but also that we may be His witnesses and weapons, according to that great word: 'This people have I formed for Myself. They shall shew forth My praise.'

God has 'shined into our hearts in order that we may give,' reflecting the beams that fall upon them, 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.' Brother and sister, if you have the Christian life in your souls, one purpose of your possessing it is that you may bear witness for Him.

Again, such witness-bearing is the result of all true, deep, Christian life. All life longs to manifest itself in action. Every conviction that a man has seeks for utterance; especially so do the beliefs that go deepest and touch the moral and spiritual nature and relationships of a man. He that perceives them is thereby impelled to desire to utter them. There can be no real, deep possession of that great truth of the Gospel which we profess to be the foundation of our personal lives, unless we have felt the impulse to spread the name and to declare the sweetness of the Lord. The very same impulse that makes the loving heart carve the beloved name on the smooth rind of the tree makes it sweet to one who is in real touch and living fellowship with Jesus Christ to speak about Him. O brother! *there* is a very sharp test for us. I know that there are hundreds of professing Christians—decent, respectable sort of people, with a tepid, average amount of Christian faith and principle in them—who never felt that overmastering desire, 'I *must* let this thing out through my lips.' Why? Why do they not feel it? Because their own possession of Christ is so superficial and partial. Jeremiah's experience will be repeated where there is vigorous Christian life: 'Thy word shut up in my bones was like a fire'—that burned itself through all the mass that was laid upon it, and ate its way victoriously into the light—'and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.' Christian men and women, do you know anything of that o'ermastering impulse? If you do not, look to the depth and reality of your Christian profession.

Again, this witnessing is the condition of all strong life. If you keep nipping the buds off a plant you will kill it. If you never say a word to a human soul about your Christianity, your Christianity will tend to evaporate. Action confirms and strengthens convictions; speech deepens conviction; and although it is possible for any one—and some of us ministers are in great danger of making the possibility a reality—to talk away his religion, for one of us who loses it by speaking too much about it, there are twenty that damage it by speaking too little. Shut it up, and it will be like some wild creature put into a cellar, fast locked and unventilated; when you open the door it will be dead. Shut it up, as so many of our average Christian professors and members of our congregations and churches do, and when you come to take it out, it will be like some volatile perfume that has been put into a vial and locked away in a drawer and forgotten; there will be nothing left but an empty bottle, and a rotten cork. Speak your faith if you would have your faith strengthened. Muzzle it, and you go a long way to kill it. You are witnesses, and you cannot blink the obligation nor shirk the duties without damaging that in yourselves to which you are to witness.

Further, this task of witnessing for Christ can be done by all kinds of life. I do not need to dwell upon the distinction between the two great methods which open themselves out before every one of us. They do so; for direct work in speaking the name of Jesus Christ is possible for every Christian, whoever he or she is, however weak, ignorant, uninfluential, with howsoever narrow a circle. There is always somebody that God means to be the audience of His servant whenever that servant speaks of Christ. Do you not know that there are people in this world, as wives, children, parents, friends of different sorts, who would listen to you more readily than they would listen to any one else speaking about Jesus Christ? Friend, have you utilised these relationships in the interests of that great Name, and in the highest interests of the persons that sustain them to you, and of yourselves who sustain these to them?

And then there is indirect work that we can all do in various ways. I do not mean only by giving money, though of course that is important, but I mean all the manifold ways in which Christian people can show their sympathy with, and their interest in, the various forms in which adventurous, chivalrous, enterprising Christian benevolence expresses itself. It was an old law in Israel that 'as his part was that went down into the battle, so should his part be that tarried by the stuff.' When victory was won and the spoil came to be shared, the men who had stopped behind and looked after the base of operations and kept open the communications received the same portion as the man that, in the front rank of the battle, had rushed upon the spears of the Amalekites. Why? Because from the same motive they had been co-operant to the same great end. The Master has taken up that very thought, and has applied it in relation to the indirect work of His people, when He says, 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' The motive is the same; therefore the essential character of the act is the same; therefore the recompense is identical. You can witness for Christ directly, if you can say—and you can all say if you like—'We have found the Messias,' and you can witness for Christ by casting yourselves earnestly into sympathy with and, so far as possible, help to the work that your brethren are doing. Dear friends, I beseech you to remember that we are all of us, if we are His followers, bound in our humble measure and degree, and with a reverent apprehension of the gulf between us and Him, still to take up His words and say, 'To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth.'

II. There is a second thought that I would suggest from these words, and that is that secular events are ordered with a view to this witnessing.

Take the case before us. Here are two independent and hostile powers; on the one hand the bigoted Jewish Sanhedrim, hating the Roman yoke; and on the other hand the haughty and cruel pressure of that yoke on a recalcitrant and reluctant people: and these two internecine enemies are working on their own lines, each very willing to thwart the other, Mechanicians talk of the 'composition of forces,' by which two pressures acting at right angles to each other on a given object, impart to it a diagonal motion. The Sanhedrim on the one side, representing Judaism, and the captain of the castle on the other, representing the Roman power, work into each other's hands, although neither of them knows it; and work out the fulfilment of a purpose that is hidden from them both.

No doubt it would be a miserably inadequate account of things to say that the Roman Empire came into existence for the sake of propagating Christianity. No doubt it is always dangerous to account for any phenomenon by the ends which, to our apprehension, it serves. But at the same time the study of the purposes which a given thing, being in existence, serves, and the study of the forces which brought it into existence, ought to be combined, and when combined, they present a double reason for adoring that great Providence which 'makes the wrath of men to praise' it, and uses for moral and spiritual ends the creatures that exist, the events that emerge, and even the godless doings of godless men.

So here we have a standing example of the way in which, like silk-worms that are spinning threads for a web that they have no notion of, the deeds of men that think not so are yet grasped and twined together by Jesus Christ, the Lord of providence, so as to bring about the realisation of His great purposes. And that is always so, more or less clearly.

For instance, if we wish to understand our own lives, do not let us dwell upon the superfinalities of joy or sorrow, gain or loss, but let us get down to the depth, and see that all these externals have two great purposes in view—first, that we may be made like our Lord, as the Scripture itself says, 'That we may be partakers of His holiness,' and then that we may bear our testimony to His grace and love. Oh, if we would only look at life from that point of view, we should be brought to a stand less often at what we choose to call the mysteries of providence! Not enjoyment, not sorrow, but our perfecting in godliness and of the increase of our power and opportunities to bear witness to Him, are the intention of all that befalls us.

I need not speak about how this same principle must be applied, by every man who believes in a divine providence, to the wider events of the world's history. I need not dwell upon that, nor will your time allow me to do it, but one word I should like to say, and that is that surely the two facts that we, as Christians, possess, as we believe, the pure faith, and that we, as Englishmen, are members of a community whose influence is world-wide, do not come together for nothing, or only that some of you might make fortunes out of the East Indian and China trade, but in order that all we English Christians might feel that, our speaking as we do the language which is destined, as it would appear, to run round the whole world, and our having, as we have, the faith which we believe brings salvation to every man of every race and tongue who accepts it, and our having this responsible necessary contact with the heathen races, lay upon us English Christians obligations the pressure and solemnity of which we have yet failed to appreciate.

Paul was immortal till his work was done. 'Be of good cheer, Paul; thou must bear witness at Rome.' And so, for ourselves and for the Gospel that we profess, the same divine Providence which orders events so that His servants may have the opportunities of witnessing to it, will take care that it shall not perish—notwithstanding all the premature jubilation of anti-Christian literature and thought in this day—until it has done its work. We need have no fear for ourselves, for though our blind eyes often fail to see, and our bleeding hearts often fail to accept, the conviction that there are no unfinished lives for His servants, yet we may be sure that He will watch over each of His children till they have finished the work that He gives them to do. And we may be sure, in regard to His great Gospel, that nothing can sink the ship that carries Christ and His fortunes. 'Be of good cheer . . . thou hast borne witness . . . thou must bear witness.'

III. Lastly, we have here another principle—namely that faithful witnessing is rewarded by further witnessing.

'Thou hast . . . in Jerusalem,' the little city perched upon its crag; 'Thou must . . . in Rome,' the great capital seated on its seven hills. The reward for work is more work. Jesus Christ did not say to the Apostle, though he was 'wearied with that which came upon him daily, the care of all the churches,' 'Thou hast borne witness, and now come apart and rest'; but He said to him, 'Thou hast filled the smaller sphere; for recompense I put thee into a larger.'

That is the law for life and everywhere, the tools to the hand that can use them. The man that can do a thing gets it to do in too large a measure, as he sometimes thinks; but he gets it, and it is all right that he should. 'To him that hath shall be given.' And it is the law for heaven. 'Thou hast borne witness down on the little dark earth; come up higher and witness for Me here, amid the blaze.'

It is the law for this Christian work of ours. If you have shone faithfully in your 'little corner,' as the child's hymn says, you will be taken out and set upon the lamp-stand, that you 'may give light to all that are in the house.' And it is the law for this great enterprise of Christian missions, as we all know. We are overwhelmed with our success. Doors are opening around us on every side. There is no limit to the work that English Churches can do, except their inclination to do it. But the opportunities open to us require a far deeper consecration and a far closer dwelling beside our Master than we have ever realised. We are half asleep yet; we do not know our resources in men, in money, in activity, in prayer.

Surely there can be no sadder sign of decadence and no surer precursor of extinction than to fall beneath the demands of our day; to have doors opening at which we are too lazy or selfish to go in; to be so sound asleep that we never hear the man of Macedonia when he stands by us and cries, 'Come over and help us!' We are members of a Church that God has appointed to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth. We are citizens of a nation whose influence is ubiquitous and felt in every land. By both characters, God summons us to tasks which will tax all our resources worthily to do. We inherit a work from our fathers which God has shown that He owns by giving us these golden opportunities. He summons us: 'Lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes. Come out of Jerusalem; come into Rome.' Shall we respond? God give us grace to fill the sphere in which He has set us, till He lifts us to the wider one, where the faithfulness of the steward is exchanged for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for the joy of the Lord!

A PLOT DETECTED

'And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. 14. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to-morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. 16. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. 17. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. 18. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. 19. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? 20. And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to-morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. 22. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.'—ACTS xxiii. 12-22.

'THE wicked plotteth against the just. . . . The Lord will laugh at him.' The Psalmist's experience and his faith were both repeated in Paul's case. His speech before the Council had set Pharisees and Sadducees squabbling, and the former had swallowed his Christianity for the sake of his being 'a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee.' Probably, therefore, the hatchers of this plot were Sadducees, who hated Pharisees even more than they did Christians. The Apostle himself was afterwards not quite sure that his skilful throwing of the apple of discord between the two parties was right (Acts xxiv. 21), and apparently it was the direct occasion of the conspiracy. A Christian man's defence of himself and his faith gains nothing by clever tactics. It is very doubtful whether what Paul spoke 'in that hour' was taught him by the Spirit.

'The corruption of the best is the worst.' There is a close and strange alliance between formal religion and murderous hatred and vulpine craft, as the history of ecclesiastical persecution shows; and though we have done with fire and faggot now, the same evil passions and tempers do still in modified form lie very near to a Christianity which has lost its inward union with Jesus and lives on surface adherence to forms. In that sense too 'the letter killeth.' We lift up our hands in horror at these fierce fanatics, 'ready to kill' Paul, because he believed in resurrection, angel, and spirit. We need to guard ourselves lest something of their temper should be in us. There is a devilish ingenuity about the details of the plot, and a truly Oriental mixture of murderous passion and calculating craft. The serpent's wisdom and his poison fangs are both apparent. The forty conspirators must have been 'ready,' not only to kill Paul, but to die in the attempt, for the distance from the castle to the council-chamber was short, and the detachment of legionaries escorting the prisoner would have to be reckoned with.

The pretext of desiring to inquire more fully into Paul's opinions derived speciousness from his ambiguous declaration, which had set the Council by the ears and had stopped his examination. Luke does not tell us what the Council said to the conspirators, but we learn from what Paul's nephew says in verse 20 that it 'agreed to ask thee to bring down Paul.' So once more the tail drove on the head, and the Council became the tool of fierce zealots. No doubt most of its members would have shrunk from themselves killing Paul, but they did not shrink from having a hand in his death. They were most religious and respectable men, and probably soothed their consciences with thinking that, after all, the responsibility was on the shoulders of the forty conspirators. How men can cheat themselves for a while as to the criminality of indirectly contributing to criminal acts, and how rudely the thin veil will be twitched aside one day!

II. The abrupt introduction of Paul's nephew into the story piques curiosity, but we cannot say more about him than is told us here. We do not know whether he was moved by being a fellow-believer in Jesus, or simply by kindred and natural affection. Possibly he was, as his uncle had been, a student under some distinguished Rabbi. At all events, he must have had access to official circles to have come on the track of the plot, which would, of course, be covered up as much as possible. The rendering in the margin of the Revised Version gives a possible explanation of his knowledge of it by suggesting that he had 'come in upon them'; that is, upon the Council in their deliberations. But probably the rendering preferred in the text is preferable, and we are left to conjecture his source of information, as almost everything else about him. But it is more profitable to note how God works out His purposes and delivers His servants by 'natural' means, which yet are as truly divine working as was the sending of the angel to smite off Peter's chains, or the earthquake at Philippi.

This lad was probably not an inhabitant of Jerusalem, and that he should have been there then, and come into possession of the carefully guarded secret, was more than a fortunate coincidence. It was divinely ordered, and God's finger is as evident in the concatenation of co-operating natural events as in any 'miracle.' To co-ordinate these so that they concur to bring about the fulfilment of His will may be a less conspicuous, but is not a less veritable, token of a sovereign Will at work in the world than any miracle is. And in this case how wonderfully separate factors, who think themselves quite independent, are all handled like pawns on a chessboard by Him who 'makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and girds Himself with the remainder thereof!' Little did the fiery zealots who were eager to plunge their daggers into Paul's heart, or the lad who hastened to tell him the secret he had discovered, or the Roman officer who equally hastened to get rid of his troublesome prisoner, dream that they were all partners in bringing about one God-determined result—the fulfilment of the promise that had calmed Paul in the preceding night: 'So must thou bear witness also at Rome.'

III. Paul had been quieted after his exciting day by the vision which brought that promise, and this new peril did not break his peace. With characteristic clear-sightedness he saw the right thing to do in the circumstances, and with characteristic promptitude he did it at once. Luke wastes no words in telling of the Apostle's emotions when this formidable danger was sprung on him, and the very reticence deepens the impression of Paul's equanimity and practical wisdom. A man who had had such a vision last night might well possess his soul in patience, even though such a plot was laid bare this morning; and each servant of Jesus may be as well assured, as was Paul the prisoner, that the Lord shall 'keep him from all evil,' and that if his life is 'witness' it will not end till his witness is complete. Our faith should work in us calmness of spirit, clearness of perception of the right thing to do, swift seizing of opportunities. Paul trusted Jesus' word that he should be safe, whatever dangers threatened, but that trust stimulated his own efforts to provide for his safety.

IV. The behaviour of the captain is noteworthy, as showing that he had been impressed by Paul's personal magnetism, and that he had in him a strain of courtesy and kindliness. He takes the lad by the hand to encourage him, and he leads him aside that he may speak freely, and thereby shows that he trusted him. No doubt the youth would be somewhat flustered at being brought into the formidable presence and by the weight of his tidings, and the great man's gentleness would be a cordial. A superior's condescension is a wonderful lip-opener. We all have some people who look up to us, and to whom small kindlinesses from us are precious. We do not 'render to all their dues,' unless we give gracious courtesy to those beneath, as well as 'honour' to those above, us. But the captain could clothe himself too with official reserve and keep up the dignity of his office. He preserved an impenetrable silence as to his intentions, and simply sealed the young man's lips from tattling about the plot or the interview with him. Promptly he acted, without waiting for the Council's application to him At once he prepared to despatch Paul to Cæsarea, glad enough, no doubt, to wash his hands of so troublesome a charge. Thus he too was a cog in the wheel, an instrument to fulfil the promise made in vision, God's servant though he knew it not.

A LOYAL TRIBUTE[1]

'. . . Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, 3. We accept it always . . . with all thankfulness.'—ACTS xxiv. 2-3.

THESE words were addressed by a professional flatterer to one of the worst of the many bad Roman governors of Syria. The speaker knew that he was lying, the listeners knew that the eulogium was undeserved; and among all the crowd of bystanders there was perhaps not a man who did not hate the governor, and would not have been glad to see him lying dead with a dagger in his breast.

But both the fawning Tertullus and the oppressor Felix knew in their heart of hearts that the words described what a governor ought to be. And though they are touched with the servility which is not loyalty, and embrace a conception of the royal function attributing far more to the personal influence of a monarch than our State permits, still we may venture to take them as the starting-point for two or three considerations suggested to us, by the celebrations of the past week.

I almost feel that I owe an apology for turning to that subject, for everything that can be said about it has been said far better than I can say it. But still, partly because my silence might be misunderstood, and partly because an opportunity is thereby afforded for looking from a Christian point of view at one or two subjects that do not ordinarily come within the scope of one's ministry, I venture to choose such a text now.

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[1] Preached on the occasion of the Jubilee of Queen Victoria.

I. The first thing that I would take it as suggesting is the grateful acknowledgment of personal worth.

I suppose the world never saw a national rejoicing like that through which we have passed. For the reigns that have been long enough to admit of it have been few, and those in which intelligently and sincerely a whole nation of freemen could participate have been fewer still. But now all England has been one; whatever our divisions of opinion, there have been no divisions here. Not only have the bonfires flared from hill to hill in this little island of ours, but all over the world, into every out of the way corner where our widely-spread race has penetrated, the same sentiment has extended. All have yielded to the common impulse, the rejoicing of a free people in a good Queen.

That common sentiment has embraced two things, the office and the person. There was a pathetic contrast between these two when that sad-hearted widow walked alone up the nave of Westminster Abbey, and took her seat on the stone of destiny on which for a millennium kings have been crowned. The contrast heightened both the reverence due to the office and the sympathy due to the woman. The Sovereign is the visible expression of national power, the incarnation of England, living history, the outcome of all the past, the representative of harmonised and blended freedom and law, a powerful social influence from which much good might flow, a moderating and uniting power amidst fierce partisan bitterness and hate, a check against rash change. There is no nobler office upon earth.

And when, as is the case in this long reign, that office has been filled with some consciousness of its responsibilities, the recognition of the fact is no flattery but simple duty. We cannot attribute to the personal initiative of the Queen the great and beneficent changes which have coincided with her reign. Thank God, no monarch can make or mar England now. But this we can say,

'Her court was pure, her life serene.'

A life touched with many gracious womanly charities, delighting in simple country pleasures, not strange to the homes of the poor, quick to sympathise with sorrow, especially the humblest, as many a weeping widow at a pit mouth has thankfully felt; sternly repressive of some forms of vice in high places, and, as we may believe, not ignorant of the great Comforter nor disobedient to the King of kings,—for such a royal life a nation may well be thankful. We outsiders do not know how far personal influence from the throne has in any case restrained or furthered national action, but if it be true, as is alleged, that twice in her reign the Queen has kept England from the sin and folly of war, once from a fratricidal conflict with the great new England across the Atlantic, then we owe her much. If in later years that life has somewhat shrunk into itself and sat silent, with Grief for a companion, those who know a like desolation will understand, and even the happy may honour an undying love and respect the seclusion of an undying sorrow. So I say: 'Forasmuch as under thee we enjoy great quietness, we accept it with all thankfulness.'

II. My text may suggest for us a wider view of progress which, although not initiated by the Queen, has coincided with her fifty years' reign.

In the Revised Version, instead of 'worthy deeds are done,' we read '*evils are corrected*'; and that is the true rendering. The double function which is here attributed falsely to an oppressive tyrant is the ancient ideal of monarchy—first, that it shall repress disorders and secure tranquillity within the borders and across the frontiers; and second, that abuses and evils shall be corrected by the foresight of the monarch.

Now, in regard to both these functions we have learned that a nation can do them a great deal better than a sovereign. And so when we speak of progress during this fifty years' reign, we largely mean the progress which England in its toiling millions and in its thinking few has won for itself. Let me in very brief words try to touch upon the salient points of that progress for which as members of the nation it becomes us as Christian people to be thankful. Enough hosannas have been sung already, and I need not add my poor voice to them, about material progress and commercial prosperity and the growth of manufacturing industry and inventions and all the rest of it. I do not for a moment mean to depreciate these, but it is of more importance that a telegraph should have something to say than that it should be able to speak across the waters, and 'man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' We who live in a great commercial community and know how solid comfort and hope and gladness are all contingent, in millions of humble homes, upon the manufacturing industry of these districts, shall never be likely to underrate the enormous expansion in national industry, and the consequent enormous increase in national wealth, which belongs to this last half century. I need say nothing about these.

Let me remind you, and I can only do it in a sentence or two, of more important changes in these fifty years. English manners and morals have been bettered, much of savagery and coarseness has been got rid of; low, cruel amusements have been abandoned. Thanks to the great Total Abstinence movement very largely, the national conscience has been stirred in regard to the great national sin of intoxication. A national system of education has come into operation and is working wonders in this land. Newspapers and books are cheapened; political freedom has been extended and 'broadened slowly down,' as is safe, 'from precedent to precedent,' so that no party thinks now of reversing any of the changes, howsoever fiercely they were contested ere they were won. Religious thought has widened, the sects have come nearer each other, men have passed from out of a hard doctrinal Christianity, in which the person of Christ was buried beneath the cobwebs of theology, into a far freer and a far more Christ-regarding and Christ-centred faith. And if we are to adopt such a point of view as the brave Apostle Paul took, the antagonism against religion, which is a marked feature of our generation, and contrasts singularly with the sleepy acquiescence of fifty years ago, is to be put down to the credit side of the account. 'For,' he said, like a bold man believing that he had an irrefragable truth in his hands, 'I will tarry here, for a great door and an effectual is opened, and there are many adversaries.' Wherever a whole nation is interested and stirred about religious subjects, even though it may be in contradiction and antagonism, God's truth can fight opposition far better than it can contend with indifference. Then if we look upon our churches, whilst there is amongst them all abounding worldliness much to be deplored, there is also, thank God, springing up amongst us a new consciousness of responsibility, which is not confined to Christian people, for the condition of the poor and the degraded around us; and everywhere we see good men and women trying to stretch their hands across these awful gulfs in our social system which make such a danger in our modern life, and to reclaim the outcasts of our cities, the most hopeless of all the heathen on the face of the earth. These things, on which I have touched with the lightest hand, all taken together do make a picture for which we may be heartily thankful.

Only, brethren, let us remember that that sort of talk about England's progress may very speedily become offensive self-conceit, and a measuring of ourselves with ludicrous self-satisfaction against all other nations. There is a bastard patriotism which has been very loud-mouthed in these last days, of which wise men should beware.

Further, such a contemplation of the elements of national progress, which we owe to no monarch and to no legislature, but largely to the indomitable pluck and energy of our people, to Anglo-Saxon persistence not knowing when it is beaten, and to the patient meditation of thoughtful minds and the self-denying efforts of good philanthropical and religious people—such a contemplation, I say, may come between us and the recognition of the highest source from which it flows, and be corrupted into forgetfulness of God. 'Beware lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied, then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God . . . and thou say in thine heart, My power, and the might of mine hand, hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth.'

And the last caution that I would put in here is, let us beware lest the hosannas over national progress shall be turned into 'Rest and be thankful,' or shall ever come in the way of the strenuous and persistent reaching forth to the fair ideal that lies so far before us.

III. That leads me to the last point on which I would say a word, viz., that my text with its reference to the correction of evils, as one of the twin functions of the monarch, naturally suggests to us the thought which should follow all recognition of progress in the past—the consideration of what yet remains to be done.

A great controversy has been going on, or at least a remarkable difference of opinion has been expressed in recent months by two of the greatest minds and clearest heads in England; one of our greatest poets and one of our greatest statesmen. The one looking back over sixty years sees but foiled aspirations and present devildom and misery. The other looking back over the same period sees accomplished dreams and the prophecy of further progress. It is not for me to enter upon the strife between such authorities. Both are right. Much has been achieved. 'There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed.' Whatever have been the victories and the blessings of the past, there are rotten places in our social state which, if not cauterised and healed, will break out into widespread and virulent sores. There are dangers in the near future which may well task the skill of the bravest and the faith of the most trustful. There are clouds on the horizon which may speedily turn jubilations into lamentations, and the best security against these is that each of us in his place, as a unit however insignificant in the great body politic, should use our little influence on the side that makes for righteousness, and see to it that we leave some small corner of this England, which God has given us in charge, sweeter and holier because of our lives. The ideal for you Christian men and women is the organisation of society on Christian principles. Have we got to that yet, or within sight of it, do you suppose? Look round you. Does anybody believe that the present arrangements in connection with unrestricted competition and the distribution of wealth coincide accurately with the principles of the New Testament? Will anybody tell me that the state of a hundred streets within a mile of this spot is what it would be if the Christian men of this nation lived the lives that they ought to live? Could there be such rottenness and corruption if the 'salt' had not 'lost his savour'? Will anybody tell me that the disgusting vice which our newspapers do not think themselves degraded by printing in loathsome detail, and so bringing the foulness of a common sewer on to every breakfast-table in the kingdom, is in accordance with the organisation of society on Christian principles? Intemperance, social impurity, wide, dreary tracts of ignorance, degradation, bestiality the awful condition of the lowest layer in our great cities, crushed like some crumbling bricks beneath the ponderous weight of the splendid superstructure, the bitter partisan spirit of politics, where the followers of each chief think themselves bound to believe that he is immaculate and that the other side has no honour or truth belonging to it—these things testify against English society, and make one almost despair when one thinks that, after a thousand years and more of professing Christianity, that is all that we can show for it.

O brethren! we may be thankful for what has been accomplished, but surely there had need also to be penitent recognition of failure and defect. And I lay it on the consciences of all that listen to me now to see to it that they do their parts as members of this body politic of England. A great heritage has come down from our fathers; pass it on bettered by your self-denial and your efforts. And remember that the way to mend a kingdom is to begin by mending yourselves, and letting Christ's kingdom come in your own hearts. Next we are bound to try to further its coming in the hearts of others, and so to promote its leavening society and national life. No Christian is clear from the blood of men and the guilt of souls who does not, according to opportunity and capacity, repair before his own door, and seek to make some one know the unsearchable riches of the Gospel of Christ.

There is no finality for a Christian patriot until his country be organised on Christian principles, and so from being merely a 'kingdom of the world' become 'a Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.' To help forward that consummation, by however little, is the noblest service that prince or peasant can render to his country. By conformity to the will of God and not by material progress or intellectual enlightenment is a state prosperous and strong. To keep His statutes and judgments is 'your wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'

PAUL BEFORE FELIX

'Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: 11. Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. 12. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: 13. Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. 14. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: 15. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. 16. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. 17. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. 18. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. 19. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. 20. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil-doing in me, while I stood before the council, 21. Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. 22. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. 23. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. 24. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.'—Acts xxiv. 10-25.

Tertullus made three charges against Paul: first, that he incited to rebellion; second, that he was a principal member of a 'sect'; third (with a 'moreover,' as if an afterthought), that he had profaned the Temple. It was more clever than honest to put the real cause of Jewish hatred last, since it was a trifle in Roman eyes, and to put first the only thing that Felix would think worth notice. A duller man than he might have scented something suspicious in Jewish officials being so anxious to suppress insurrection against Rome, and probably he had his own thoughts about the good faith of the accusers, though he said nothing. Paul takes up the three points in order. Unsupported charges can only be met by emphatic denials.

I. Paul's speech is the first part of the passage. Its dignified, courteous beginning contrasts well with the accuser's dishonest flattery. Paul will not lie, but he will respect authority, and will conciliate when he can do so with truth. Felix had been 'judge' for several years, probably about six. What sort of a judge he had been Paul will not say. At any rate he had gained experience which might help him in picking his way through Tertullus's rhetoric.

The Apostle answers the first charge with a flat denial, with the remark that as the whole affair was less than a fortnight old the truth could easily be ascertained, and that the time was very short for the Jews to have 'found' him such a dangerous conspirator, and with the obviously unanswerable demand for proof to back up the charge. In the absence of witnesses there was nothing more to be done about number one of the accusations, and a just judge would have said so and sent Tertullus and his clients about their business.

The second charge Paul both denies and admits. He does belong to the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. But that is not a 'sect'; it is 'the Way.' It is not a divergence from the path in which the fathers have walked, trodden only by some self-willed schismatics, but it is the one God-appointed path of life, 'the old way,' the only road by which a man can walk nobly and travel to the skies. Paul's whole doctrine as to the relation of Judaism to Christianity is here in germ and in a form adapted to Felix's comprehension. This so-called sect (ver. 14 takes up Tertullus's word in ver. 5) is the true Judaism, and its members are more truly 'Jews' than they who are such 'outwardly.' For what has Paul cast away in becoming a Christian? Not the worship of the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, not the law, not the prophets, not the hope of a resurrection.

He does not say that he practises all the things written in the law, but that he 'believes' them. Then the law was revelation as well as precept, and was to be embraced by faith before it could be obeyed in practice; it was, as he says elsewhere, a 'schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.' Judaism is the bud; Christianity is the bright consummate flower. Paul was not preaching his whole Gospel, but defending himself from a specific charge; namely that, as being a 'Nazarene,' he had started off from the main line of Jewish religion. He admits that he is a 'Nazarene,' and he assumes correctly that Felix knew something about them, but he denies that he is a sectary, and he assumes that the charge would be more truly made against those who, accusing him, disbelieved in Christ. He hints that they did not believe in either law or prophets, else they would have been Nazarenes too.

The practical results of his faith are stated. 'Herein'; that is in the faith and hope just spoken of. He will not say that these make him blameless towards God and men, but that such blamelessness is his aim, which he pursues with earnest toil and self-control. A Christianity which does not sovereignly sway life and brace its professor up to the self-denial needful to secure a conscience void of offence is not Paul's kind of Christianity. If we move in the circle of the great Christian truths we shall gird ourselves to subdue the flesh, and will covet more than aught else the peace of a good conscience. But, like Paul, we shall be slow to say that we have attained, yet not afraid to say that we strive towards, that ideal.

The third charge is met by a plain statement of his real purpose in coming to Jerusalem and frequenting the Temple. Profane the Temple! Why, I came all the way from Greece on purpose to worship at the Feast; and I did not come empty-handed either, for I brought alms for my nation'—the contributions of the Gentiles to Jews—'and I was a worshipper, discharging the ceremonial purifications.' They called him a 'Nazarene'; he was in the Temple as a 'Nazarite.' Was it likely that, being there on such an errand, he should have profaned it?

He begins a sentence, which would probably have been an indignant one, about the 'certain Jews from Asia,' the originators of the whole trouble, but he checks himself with a fine sense of justice. He will say nothing about absent men. And that brings him back to his strong point, already urged, the absence of proof of the charges. Tertullus and company had only hearsay. What had become of the people who said they saw him in the Temple? No doubt they had thought discretion the better part of valour, and were not anxious to face the Roman procedure.

The close of the speech carries the war into the enemy's quarters, challenging the accusers to tell what they had themselves heard. They *could* be witnesses as to the scene at the Council, which Tertullus had wisely said nothing about. Pungent sarcasm is in

Paul's closing words, especially if we remember that the high officials, like Ananias the high-priest, were Sadducees. The Pharisees in the Council had acquitted him when they heard his profession of faith in a resurrection. That was his real crime, not treason against Rome or profanation of the Temple. The present accusers might be eager for his condemnation, but half of their own Sanhedrim had acquitted him. 'And these unworthy Jews, who have cast off the nation's hope and believe in no resurrection, are accusing me of being an apostate! Who is the sectary—I or they?'

II. There was only one righteous course for Felix, namely, to discharge the prisoner. But he yielded to the same temptation as had mastered Pilate, and shrank from provoking influential classes by doing the right thing. He was the less excusable, because his long tenure of office had taught him something, at all events, of 'the Way.' He had too many crimes to venture on raising enemies in his government; he had too much lingering sense of justice to give up an innocent man. So like all weak men in difficult positions he temporised, and trusted to accident to make the right thing easier for him.

His plea for delay was conveniently indefinite. When was Lysias coming? His letter said nothing about such an intention, and took for granted that all the materials for a decision would be before Felix. Lysias could tell no more. The excuse was transparent, but it served to stave off a decision, and to-morrow would bring some other excuse. Prompt carrying out of all plain duty is the only safety. The indulgence given to Paul, in his light confinement, only showed how clearly Felix knew himself to be doing wrong, but small alleviations do not patch up a great injustice.

III. One reading inserts in verse 24 the statement that Drusilla wished to see Paul, and that Felix summoned him in order to gratify her. Very probably she, as a Jewess, knew something of 'the Way,' and with a love of anything odd and new, which such women cannot do without, she wanted to see this curious man and hear him talk. It might amuse her, and pass an hour, and be something to gossip about.

She and Felix got more than they bargained for. Paul was not now the prisoner, but the preacher; and his topics were not wanting in directness and plainness. He 'reasoned of righteousness' to one of the worst of unrighteous governors; of 'temperance' to the guilty couple who, in calling themselves husband and wife, were showing themselves given over to sinful passions; and of 'judgment to come' to a man who, to quote the Roman historian, 'thought that he could commit all evil with impunity.'

Paul's strong hand shook even that obdurate soul, and roused one of the two sleeping consciences. Drusilla may have been too frivolous to be impressed, but Felix had so much good left that he could be conscious of evil. Alas! he had so much evil that he suppressed the good. His 'convenient season' was then; it never came again. For though he communed with Paul often, he trembled only once. So he passed into the darkness.

FELIX BEFORE PAUL

A Sermon to the Young

And as Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.'—ACTS xxiv. 25.

FELIX and his brother had been favourite slaves of the Emperor, and so had won great power at court. At the date of this incident he had been for some five or six years the procurator of the Roman province of Judæa; and how he used his power the historian Tacitus tells us in one of his bitter sentences, in which he says, 'He wielded his kingly authority with the spirit of a slave, in all cruelty and lust.'

He had tempted from her husband, Drusilla, the daughter of that Herod whose dreadful death is familiar to us all; and his court reeked with blood and debauchery. He is here face to face with Paul for the second time. On a former interview he had seen good reason to conclude that the Roman Empire was not in much danger from this one Jew whom his countrymen, with suspicious loyalty, were charging with sedition; and so he had allowed him a very large margin of liberty.

On this second occasion he had sent for him evidently not as a judge, but partly with a view to try to get a bribe out of him, and partly because he had some kind of languid interest, as most Romans then had, in Oriental thought—some languid interest perhaps too in this strange man. Or he and Drusilla were possibly longing for a new sensation, and not indisposed to give a moment's glance at Paul with his singular ideas.

So they called for the Apostle, and the guilty couple found a judge in their prisoner. Paul does not speak to them as a Greek philosopher, anxious to please high personages, might have done, but he goes straight at their sins: he reasons 'of righteousness' with the unjust judge, 'of temperance' with the self-indulgent, sinful pair, 'of the judgment to come' with these two who thought that they could do anything they liked with impunity. Christianity has sometimes to be exceedingly rude in reference to the sins of the upper classes.

As Paul went on, a strange fear began to creep about the heart of Felix. It is the watershed of his life that he has come to, the crisis of his fate. Everything depends on the next five minutes. Will he yield? Will he resist? The tongue of the balance trembles and hesitates for a moment, and then, but slowly, the wrong scale goes down; 'Go thy way for this time.' Ah! if he had said, 'Come and help me to get rid of this strange fear,' how different all might have been! The metal was at the very point of melting. What shape would it take? It ran into the wrong mould, and, as far as we know, it was hardened there. 'It might have been once, and he missed it, lost it for ever. No sign marked out that moment from the common uneventful moments, though it saw the death of a soul.'

Now, my dear young friends, I do not intend to say anything more to you of this man and his character, but I wish to take this incident and its lessons and urge them on your hearts and consciences.

I. Let me say a word or two about the fact, of which this incident is an example, and of which I am afraid the lives of many of you would furnish other examples, that men lull awakened consciences to sleep and excuse delay in deciding for Christ by half-honest promises to attend to religion at some future time.

'Go thy way for this time' is what Felix is really anxious about. His one thought is to get rid of Paul and his disturbing message for the present. But he does not wish to shut the door altogether. He gives a sop to his conscience to stop its barking, and he probably deceives himself as to the gravity of his present decision by the lightly given promise and its well-guarded indefiniteness, 'When I have a convenient season I will send for thee.' The thing he really means is—Not now, at all events; the thing he hoodwinks himself with is—By and by. Now that is what I know that some of you are doing; and my purpose and earnest prayer are to bring you now to the decision which, by one vigorous act of your wills, will settle the question for the future as to which God you are going to follow.

So then I have just one or two things to say about this first part of my subject. Let me remind you that however beautiful, however gracious, however tender and full of love and mercy and good tidings the message of God's love in Jesus Christ is, there is another side to it, a side which is meant to rouse men's consciences and to awaken men's fears.

If you bring a man like the man in the story, Felix, or a very much better man than he—any of you who hear me now—into contact with these three thoughts, 'Righteousness, temperance, judgment to come,' the effect of such a direct appeal to moral convictions will always be more or less to awaken a sense of failure, insufficiency, defect, sin, and to create a certain creeping dread that if I set myself against the great law of God, that law of God will have a way of crushing me. The fear is well founded, and not only does the contemplation of God's *law* excite it. God's gospel comes to us, and just because it is a gospel, and is intended to lead you and me to love and trust Jesus Christ, and give our whole hearts and souls to Him—just because it is the best 'good news' that ever came into the world, it begins often (not always, perhaps) by making a man feel what a sinful man he is, and how he has gone against God's law, and how there hang over him, by the very necessities of the case and the constitution of the universe, consequences bitter and painful. Now I believe that there are very few people who, like you, come occasionally into contact with the preaching of the truth, who have not had their moments when they felt—'Yes, it is all true—it is all true. I *am* bad, and I *have* broken God's law, and there *is* a dark lookout before me!' I believe that most of us know what that feeling is.

And now my next step is—that the awakened conscience is just like the sense of pain in the physical world, it has a work to do and a mission to perform. It is meant to warn you off dangerous ground. Thank God for pain! It keeps off death many a time. And in like manner thank God for a swift conscience that speaks! It is meant to ring an alarm-bell to us, to make us, as the Bible has it, 'flee for refuge to the hope that is set before us.' My imploring question to my young friends now is: 'Have you used that sense of evil and wrongdoing, when it has been aroused in your consciences, to lead you to Jesus Christ, or what have you done with it?'

There are two persons in this Book of the Acts of the Apostles who pass through the same stages of feeling up to a certain point, and then they diverge. And the two men's outline history is the best sermon that I can preach upon this point. Felix becoming afraid, recoils.

shuts himself up, puts away the message that disturbs him, and settles himself back into his evil. The Philippian jailer becoming afraid (the phrases in the original being almost identical), like a sensible man tries to find out the reason of his fear and how to get rid of it; and falls down at the Apostles' feet and says, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?'

The fear is not meant to last; it is of no use in itself. It is only an impelling motive that leads us to look to the Saviour, and the man that uses it so has used it rightly. Yet there rises in many a heart that transparent self-deception of delay. 'They all with one consent began to make excuse'; that is as true to-day as it was true then. My experience tells me that it will be true in regard to a sad number of you who will go away feeling that my poor word has gone a little way into their hardened hide, but settling themselves back into their carelessness, and forgetting all impressions that have been made. O dear young friend, do not do that, I beseech you! Do not stifle the wholesome alarm and cheat yourself with the notion of a little delay!

II. And now I wish next to pass very swiftly in review before you some of the reasons why we fall into this habit of self-deceiving, indecision, and delay—'Go thy way' would be too sharp and unmistakable if it were left alone, so it is fined off. 'I will not commit myself beyond to-day,' 'for this time go thy way, and when I have a convenient season I will call for thee.'

What are the reasons for such an attitude as that? Let me enumerate one or two of them as they strike me. First, there is the instinctive, natural wish to get rid of a disagreeable subject—much as a man, without knowing what he is doing, twitches his hand away from the surgeon's lancet. So a great many of us do not like—and no wonder that we do not like—these thoughts of the old Book about 'righteousness and temperance and judgment to come,' and make a natural effort to turn our minds away from the contemplation of the subject, because it is painful and unpleasant. Do you think it would be a wise thing for a man, if he began to suspect that he was insolvent, to refuse to look into his books or to take stock, and let things drift, till there was not a halfpenny in the pound for anybody? What do you suppose his creditors would call him? They would not compliment him on either his honesty or his prudence, would they? And is it not the part of a wise man, if he begins to see that something is wrong, to get to the bottom of it and, as quickly as possible, to set it right? And what do you call people who, suspecting that there may be a great hole in the bottom of the ship, never man the pumps or do any caulking, but say, 'Oh, she will very likely keep afloat until we get into harbour'?

Do you not think that it would be a wiser thing for you if, *because* the subject is disagreeable, you would force yourself to think about it until it became agreeable to you? You can change it if you will, and make it not at all a shadow or a cloud or a darkness over you. And you can scarcely expect to claim the designation of wise and prudent orderers of your lives until you do. Certainly it is not wise to shuffle a thing out of sight because it is not pleasing to think about.

Then there is another reason. A number of our young people say, 'Go thy way for this time,' because you have a notion that it is time enough for you to begin to think about serious things and be religious when you grow a bit older. And some of you even, I dare say, have an idea that religion is all very well for people that are turned sixty and are going down the hill, but that it is quite unnecessary for you. Shakespeare puts a grim word into the mouth of one of his characters, which sets the theory of many of us in its true light, when, describing a dying man calling on God, he makes the narrator say: 'I, to comfort him, bid him he should not think of God. I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet.'

Some of my hearers practically live on that principle, and are tempted to regard thoughts of God as in place only among medicine bottles, or when the shadows of the grave begin to fall cold and damp on our path. 'Young men will be young men,' 'We must sow our wild oats,' 'You can't put old heads on young shoulders'—and such like sayings, often practically mean that vice and godlessness belong to youth, and virtue and religion to old age, just as flowers do to spring and fruit to autumn. Let me beseech you not to be deceived by such a notion; and to search your own thoughts and see whether it be one of the reasons which leads you to say, 'Go thy way for this time.'

Then again some of us fall into this habit of putting off the decision for Christ, not consciously, not by any distinct act of saying, 'No, I will not,' but simply by letting the impressions made on our hearts and consciences be crowded out of them by cares and enjoyments and pleasures and duties of this world. If you had not so much to study at College, you would have time to think about religion. If you had not so many parties and balls to go to, you would have time to nourish and foster these impressions. If you had not your place to make in the warehouse, if you had not this, that, and the other thing to do; if you had not love and pleasure and ambition and advancement and mental culture to attend to, you would have time for religion; but as soon as the seed is sown and the sower's back is turned, hovering flocks of light-winged thoughts and vanities pounce down upon it and carry it away, seed by seed. And if some stray seed here and there remains and begins to sprout, the ill weeds which grow apace spring up with ranker stems and choke it. 'The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and efface the impression made upon your hearts.

Here as I speak some serious thought is roused; by to-morrow at midday it has all gone. You did not intend it to go, you did not set yourself to banish it, you simply opened the door to the flocking in of the whole crowd of the world's cares and occupations, and away went the shy, solitary thought that, if it had been cared for and tended, might have led you at last to the Cross of Jesus Christ. Do not allow yourselves to be drifted, by the rushing current of earthly cares, from the impressions that are made upon your consciences and from the duty that you know you ought to do!

And then some of you fall into this attitude of delay, and say to the messenger of God's love, 'Go thy way for this time,' because you do not like to give up something that you know is inconsistent with His love and service. Felix would not part with Drusilla nor disgorge the ill-gotten gains of his province. Felix therefore was obliged to put away from him the thoughts that looked in that direction. I wonder if there is any young man listening to me now who feels that if he lets my words carry him where they seek to carry him, he will have to give up 'fleshly lusts which war against the soul'? I wonder if there is any young woman listening to me now who feels that if she lets my words carry her where they would carry her, she will have to live a different life from that which she has been living, to have more of a high and a noble aim in it, to live for something else than pleasure? I wonder if there are any of you who are saying, 'I cannot give up that'? My dear young friend, 'If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.' It is better for thee to enter into life blind than with both eyes to be cast into hell-fire.

Reasons for delay, then, are these: first, getting rid of an unpleasant subject; second, thinking that there is time enough; third, letting the world obliterate the impressions that have been made; and fourth, shrinking from the surrender of something that you know you will have to give up.

III. And now let me very briefly, as my last point, put before you one or two of the reasons which I would fain might be conclusive with you for present decision to take Christ for your Saviour and your Master.

And I say, Do not delay, but *now* choose Him for your Redeemer, your Friend, your Helper, your Commander, your All; because delay is really decision in the wrong way. Do not delay, but take Jesus Christ as the Saviour of your sinful souls, and rest your hearts upon Him to-night before you sleep; because there is no real reason for delay. No season will be more convenient than the present season. Every time is the right time to do the right thing, every time is the right time to begin following Him. There is nothing to wait for. There is no reason at all, except their own disinclination, why every man and woman listening to me should not now grasp the Cross of Christ as their only hope for forgiveness and acceptance, and yield themselves to that Lord, to live in His service for ever.

Let not this day pass without your giving yourselves to Jesus Christ, because every time that you have this message brought to you, and you refuse to accept it, or delay to accept it, you make yourselves less capable of receiving it another time.

If you take a bit of phosphorus and put it upon a slip of wood and ignite the phosphorus, bright as the blaze is, there drops from it a white ash that coats the wood and makes it almost incombustible. And so when the flaming conviction laid upon your hearts has burnt itself out, it has coated the heart, and it will be very difficult to kindle the light there again. Felix said, 'Go thy way, when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee.' Yes, and he did send for Paul, and he talked with him often—he repeated the conversation, but we do not know that he repeated the trembling. He often communed with Paul, but it was only once that he was alarmed. You are less likely to be touched by the Gospel message for every time that you have heard it and put it away. That is what makes my place here so terribly responsible, and makes me feel that my words are so very feeble in comparison with what they ought to be. I know that I may be doing harm to men just because they listen and are not persuaded, and so go away less and less likely to be touched.

Ah, dear friends! you will perhaps never again have as deep impressions as you have now; or at least they are not to be reckoned upon as probable, for the tendency of all truth is to lose its power by repetition, and the tendency of all emotion which is not acted upon is to become fainter and fainter. And so I beseech you that now you would cherish any faint impression that is being made upon your hearts and consciences. Let it lead you to Christ; and take Him for your Lord and Saviour now.

I say to you: Do that now because delay robs you of large blessing. You will never want Jesus Christ more than you do to-day. You need Him in your early hours. Why should it be that a portion of your lives should be left unfilled by that rich mercy? Why should you postpone possessing the purest joy, the highest blessing, the divinest strength? Why should you put off welcoming your best Friend into your heart? Why should you?

I say to you again, Take Christ for your Lord, because delay inevitably lays up for you bitter memories and involves dreadful losses. There are good Christian men and women, I have no doubt, in this world now, who would give all they have, if they could blot out of the tablets of their memories some past hours of their lives, before they gave their hearts to Jesus Christ. I would have you ignorant of such transgression. O young men and women! if you grow up into middle life not Christians, then should you ever become so, you will have habits to fight with, and remembrances that will smart and sting; and some of you, perhaps, remembrances that will pollute, even though you are conscious that you are forgiven. It is a better thing not to know the depths of evil than to know them and to have been raised from them. You will escape infinite sorrows by an early cleaving to Christ your Lord.

And last of all I say to you, give yourselves now to Jesus Christ, because no to-morrow may be yours. Delay is gambling, very irrationally, with a very uncertain thing—your life and your future opportunities. 'You know not what shall be on the morrow.'

For a generation I have preached in Manchester these annual sermons to the young. Ah, how many of those that heard the early ones are laid in their graves; and how many of them were laid in *early* graves; and how many of them said, as some of you are saying, 'When I get older I will turn religious'! And they never got older. It is a commonplace word that, but I leave it on your hearts. You have no time to lose.

Do not delay, because delay is decision in the wrong way; do not delay, because there is no reason for delay; do not delay, because delay robs you of a large blessing; do not delay, because delay lays up for you, if ever you come back, bitter memories; do not delay, because delay may end in death. And for all these reasons, come as a sinful soul to Christ the Saviour; and ask Him to forgive you, and follow in His footsteps, and do it now! 'To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

CHRIST'S REMONSTRANCES

'And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.'—ACTS xxvi. 14.

'CAN the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?' No. But God can change the skin, because He can change the nature. In this story of the conversion of the Apostle Paul—the most important thing that happened that day—we have an instance how brambles may become vines; tares may become wheat; and a hater of Jesus Christ may be changed in a moment into His lover and servant, and, if need be, His martyr.

Now the very same motives and powers which were brought to bear upon the Apostle Paul by miracle are being brought to bear upon every one of us; and my object now is just to trace the stages of the process set forth here, and to ask some of you, if you, like Paul, have been 'obedient to the heavenly vision.' Stages, I call them, though they were all crowded into a moment, for even the lightning has to pass through the intervening space when it flashes from one side of the heavens to another, and we may divide its path into periods. Time is very elastic, as any of us whose lives have held great sorrows or great joys or great resolutions well know.

I. The first of these all but simultaneous and yet separable stages was the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Of course to the Apostle it was mediated by miracle; but real as he believed that appearance of the risen Lord in the heavens to be, and valid as he maintained that it was as the ground of his Apostleship, he himself, in one of his letters, speaks of the whole incident as being the revelation of God's Son *in* him. The revelation in heart and mind was the main thing, of which the revelation to eye and ear were but means. The means, in his case, are different from those in ours; the end is the same. To Paul it came like the rush of a cataract that the Christ whom he had thought of as lying in an unknown grave was living in the heavens and ruling there. You and I, I suppose, do not need to be convinced by miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; but the bare fact that Jesus was living in the heavens would have had little effect upon Saul, unless it had been accompanied with the revelation of the startling fact that between him and Jesus Christ there were close personal relations, so that he had to do with Jesus, and Jesus with him.

'Saul, Saul! why persecutest thou Me?' They used to think that they could wake sleep-walkers by addressing them by name. Jesus Christ, by speaking His name to the Apostle, wakes him out of his diseased slumber, and brings him to wholesome consciousness. There are stringency and solemnity of address in that double use of the name 'Saul, Saul!'

What does such an address teach you and me? That Jesus Christ, the living, reigning Lord of the universe, has perfect knowledge of each of us, and that we each stand isolated before Him, as if all the light of omniscience were focussed upon us. He knows our characters; He knows all about us, and more than that, He directly addresses Himself to each man and woman among us.

We are far too apt to hide ourselves in the crowd, and let all the messages of God's love, the warnings of His providences, as well as the teachings and invitations and pleadings of His gospel, fly over our heads as if they were meant vaguely for anybody. But they are all intended for *thee*, as directly as if thou, and thou only, wert in the world. I beseech you, lay this to heart, that although no audible sounds may rend the silent heavens, nor any blaze may blind thine eye, yet that as really, though not in the same outward fashion as Saul, when they were all fallen to the earth, felt himself to be singled out, and heard a voice 'speaking to *him* in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Saul, Saul!' *thou* mayest hear a voice speaking to thee in the English tongue, by thy name, and directly addressing its gracious remonstrances and its loving offers to thy listening ear. I want to sharpen the blunt 'whosoever' into the pointed 'thou.' And I would fain plead with each of my friends hearing me now to believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is meant for thee, and that Christ speaks to *thee.* 'I have a message from God unto thee,' just as Nathan said unto David. '*Thou* art the man!'

Do not lose yourselves in the crowd or hide yourselves from the personal incidence of Christ's offer, but feel that you stand, as you do indeed, alone the hearer of His voice, the possible recipient of His saving mercy.

II. Secondly, notice, as another stage in this process the discovery of the true character of the past.

'Why persecutest thou Me?' Now I am not going to be tempted from my more direct purpose in this sermon to dwell even for a moment on the beautiful, affecting, strengthening thought here, of the unity of Jesus Christ with all the humble souls that love Him, so as that, whatsoever any member suffers, the Head suffers with it. I must leave that truth untouched.

Saul was brought to look at all his past life as standing in immediate connection with Jesus Christ Of course he knew before the vision that he had no love to Him whom he thought to be a Galilean impostor, and that the madness with which he hated the servants was only the glancing off of the arrow that he would fain have aimed at the Master. But he did not know that Jesus Christ counted every blow struck at one of His servants as being struck at Him. Above all he did not know that the Christ whom he was persecuting was reigning in the heavens. And so his whole past life stood before him in a new aspect when it was brought into close connection with Christ, and looked at as in relation to Him.

The same process would yield very remarkable results if applied to our lives. If I could only get you for one quiet ten minutes, to lay all your past, as far as memory brought it to your minds, right before that pure and loving Face, I should have done much. One infallible way of judging of the rottenness or goodness of our actions is that we should bring them where they will all be brought one day, into the brightness of Christ's countenance. If you want to find out the flaws in some thin, badly-woven piece of cloth, you hold it up against the light, do you not? and then you see all the specks and holes, and the irregular threads. Hold up your lives in like fashion against the light, and I shall be surprised if you do not find enough there to make you very much ashamed of yourselves. Were you ever on the stage of a theatre in the daytime? Did you ever see what miserable daubs the scenes look, and how seamy it all is when the pitiless sunshine comes in? Let that great light pour on your life, and be thankful if you find out what a daub it has been, whilst yet colours and brushes and time are at your disposal, and you may paint the future fairer than the past.

Again, this revelation of Saul's past life disclosed its utter unreasonableness. That one question, '*Why* persecutest thou Me?' pulverised the whole thing. It was like the wondering question so unanswerable in the Psalm, 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?' If you take into account what you are, and where you stand, you can find no reason, except utterly unreasonable ones, for the lives that I fear some of us are living—lives of godlessness and Christlessness. There is nothing in all the world a tithe so stupid as sin. There is nothing so unreasonable, if there be a God at all, and if we depend upon Him, and have duties to Him, as the lives that some of you are living. You admit, most of you, that there is such a God; you admit, most of you, that you do hang upon Him; you admit, in theory, that you ought to love and serve Him. The bulk of you call yourselves Christians. That is to say, you believe, as a piece of historical fact, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came into this world and died for men. And, believing that, you turn your back on Him, and neither love nor serve nor trust Him nor turn away from your iniquity. Is there anything outside a lunatic asylum more madlike than that? 'Why persecutest thou?' 'And he was speechless,' for no answer was possible. Why neglectest thou? Why forgettest thou? Why, admitting what thou dost, art thou not an out-and-out Christian? If we think of all our obligations and relations, and the facts of the universe, we come back to the old saying, 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,' and any man who, like many of my hearers, fails to give his heart and life to Jesus Christ will one day have to say, 'Behold, I have played the fool, and erred exceedingly.' Wake up, my brother, to apply calm reason to your lives while yet there is time, and face the question, *Why* dost thou stand as thou dost to Jesus Christ? There is nothing sadder than the small share that deliberate reason and intelligent choice have in the ordering of most men's lives. You live by impulse, by habit, by example, by constraint of the outward necessities of your position. But I am sure that there are many amongst us now who have very seldom, if ever, sat down and said, 'Now let me think, until I get to the ultimate grounds of the course of life that I am pursuing.' You can carry on the questions very gaily for a step or two, but then you come to a dead pause. 'What do I do so-and-so for?' 'Because I like it.'

'Why do I like it?' 'Because it meets my needs, or my desires, or my tastes, or my intellect.' Why do you make the meeting of your needs, or your desires, or your tastes, or your intellect your sole object? Is there any answer to that? The Hindoos say that the world rests upon an elephant, and the elephant rests upon a tortoise. What does the tortoise rest on? Nothing! Then that is what the world and the elephant rest on. And so, though you may go bravely through the first stages of the examination, when you come to the last question of all, you will find out that your whole scheme of life is built upon a blunder; and the blunder is this, that anybody can be blessed without God.

Further, this disclosure of the true character of his life revealed to Saul, as in a lightning flash, the ingratitude of it.

'Why persecutest thou Me?' That was as much as to say, 'What have I done to merit thy hate? What have I *not* done to merit rather thy love?' Paul did not know all that Jesus Christ had done for him. It took him a lifetime to learn a little of it, and to tell his brethren something of what he had learned. And he has been learning it ever since that day when, outside the walls of Rome, they hacked off his head. He has been learning more and more of what Jesus Christ has done for him, and why he should not persecute Him but love Him.

But the same appeal comes to each of us. What has Jesus Christ done for thee, my friend, for me, for every soul of man? He has loved me better than His own life. He has given Himself for me. He has lingered beside me, seeking to draw me to Himself, and He still lingers. And this, at the best, tremulous faith, this, at the warmest, tepid love, this, at the completest, imperfect devotion and service, are all that we bring to Him; and some of us do not bring even these. Some of us have never known what it was to sacrifice one inclination for the sake of Christ, nor to do one act for His dear love's sake, nor to lean our weakness upon Him, nor to turn to Him and say, 'I give Thee myself, that I may possess Thee.' 'Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?' I have heard of wounded soldiers striking with their bayonets at the ambulance men who came to help them. That is like what some of you do to the Lord who died for your healing, and comes as the Physician, with bandages and with balm, to bind up the brokenhearted. 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?'

III. Lastly, we have here a warning against self-inflicted wounds.

That second clause of the remonstrance on the lips of Christ in my text is, according to the true reading, not found in the account of Paul's conversion in the ninth chapter of this book. My text is from Paul's own story; and it is interesting to notice that he adds this eminently pathetic and forcible appeal to the shorter account given by the writer of the book. It had gone deep into his heart, and he could not forget.

The metaphor is a very plain one. The ox-goad was a formidable weapon, some seven or eight feet in length, shod with an iron point, and capable of being used as a spear, and of inflicting deadly wounds at a pinch. Held in the firm hand of the ploughman, it presented a sharp point to the rebellious animal under the yoke. If the ox had readily yielded to the gentle prick, given, not in anger, but for guidance, it had been well. But if it lashes out with its hoofs against the point, what does it get but bleeding flanks? Paul had been striking out instead of obeying, and he had won by it only bloody hocks.

There are two truths deducible from this saying, which may have been a proverb in common use. One is the utter futility of lives that are spent in opposing the divine will. There is a strong current running, and if you try to go against it you will only be swept away by it. Think of some little fishing coble coming across the bow of a great ocean-going steamer. What will be the end of that? Think of a pony-chaise jogging up the line, and an express train thundering down it. What will be the end of that? Think of a man lifting himself up and saying to God, 'I will *not*!' when God says, 'Do thou this!' or 'Be thou this!' What will be the end of that? 'The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' 'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks'—hard in regard to breaches of common morality, as some of my friends sitting quietly in these pews very well know. It is hard to indulge in sensual sin. You cannot altogether dodge what people call the 'natural consequences'; but it was God who made Nature; and so I call them God-inflicted penalties. It is hard to set yourselves against Christianity. I am not going to speak of that at all now, only when we think of the expectations of victory with which so many antagonists of the Cross have gaily leaped into the arena, and of how the foes have been forgotten and there stands the Cross still, we may say of the whole crowd, beginning with the earliest, and coming down to the latest brand-new theory that is going to explode Christianity—'it is hard to kick against the pricks.

Your own limbs you may wound; you will not do the goad much harm.

But there is another side to the proverb of my text, and that is the self-inflicted harm that comes from resisting the pricks of God's rebukes and remonstrances, whether inflicted by conscience or by any other means; including, I make bold to say, even such poor words as these of mine. For if the first little prick of conscience, a warning and a guide, be neglected, the next will go a great deal deeper. The voice which, before you do the wrong thing, says to you, 'Do not do it,' in tones of entreaty and remonstrance, speaks, after you have done it, more severely and more bitterly. The Latin word *remorse*, and the old English name for conscience, 'again-bite'—which latter is a translation of the other—teach us the same lesson, that the gnawing which comes after wrong done is far harder to bear than the touch that should have kept us from the evil. The stings of marine jelly-fish will burn for days after, if you wet them. And so all wrong-doing, and all neglect of right-doing of every sort, carries with it a subsequent pain, or else the wounded limb *mortifies*, and that is worse. There is no pain then; it would be better if there were. There is such a possibility as to have gone on so obstinately kicking against the pricks and leaving the wounds so unheeded, as that they mortify and feeling goes. A conscience 'seared with a hot iron' is ten times more dreadful than a conscience that pains and stings.

So, dear brethren, let me beseech you to listen to the pitying Christ, who says to us each, more in sorrow than in anger, 'It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' It is no pleasure to Him to hold the goad, nor that we should wound ourselves upon it. He has another question to put to us, with another 'why,' 'Why should ye be stricken any more? Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die, O house of Israel?'

There is another metaphor drawn from the employment of oxen which we may set side by side with this of my text: 'Take My yoke upon you, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' The yoke accepted, the goad is laid aside; and repose and healing from its wounds are granted to us. Dear brethren, if you will listen to the Christ revealed in the heavens, as knowing all about you, and remonstrating with you for your unreasonableness and ingratitude, and setting before you the miseries of rebellion and the suicide of sin, then you will have healing for all your wounds, and your lives will neither be self-tormenting, futile, nor unreasonable. The mercy of Jesus Christ lavished upon you makes your yielding yourselves to Him your only rational course. Anything else is folly beyond comparison and harm and loss beyond count.

FAITH IN CHRIST

'. . . Faith that is in Me.'—ACTS xxvi. 18.

IT is commonly said, and so far as the fact is concerned, said truly, that what are called the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity are rather found in the Epistles than in the Gospels. If we wish the clearest statements of the nature and person of Christ, we turn to Paul's Epistle to the Colossians. If we wish the fullest dissertation upon Christ's work as a sacrifice, we go to the Epistle to the Hebrews. If we seek to prove that men are justified by faith, and not by works, it is to the Epistles to Romans and Galatians that we betake ourselves,—to the writings of the servant rather than the words of the Master. Now this fuller development of Christian doctrine contained in the teaching of the Apostles cannot be denied, and need not be wondered at. The reasons for it I am not going to enter upon at present; they are not far to seek. Christ came not to *speak* the Gospel, but *to be* the Gospel. But then, this truth of a fuller development is often over-strained, as if Christ 'spake nothing concerning priesthood,' sacrifices, faith. He *did* so speak when on earth. It is often misused by being made the foundation of an inference unfavourable to the authority of the Apostolic teaching, when we are told, as we sometimes are, that not Paul but Jesus speaks the words which we are to receive.

Here we have Christ Himself speaking from the heavens to Paul at the very beginning of the Apostle's course, and if any one asks us where did Paul get the doctrines which he preached, the answer is, Here, on the road to Damascus, when blind, bleeding, stunned, with all his self-confidence driven out of him—with all that he had been crushed into shivers—he saw his Lord, and heard Him speak. These words spoken then are the germ of all Paul's Epistles, the keynote to which all his writings are but the melody that follows, the mighty voice of which all his teaching is but the prolonged echo. 'Delivering thee,' says Christ to him, 'from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in Me.' Now, I ask you, what of Paul's Gospel is not here? Man's ruin, man's depravity and state of darkness, the power of Satan, the sole redemptive work of Christ, justification by belief in that, sanctification coming with justification, and glory and rest and heaven at last—there they all are in the very first words that sounded upon the quickened ear of the blinded man when he turned from darkness to light.

It would be foolish, of course, to try to exhaust such a passage as this in a sermon. But notice, what a complete summary of Christian truth there lies in that one last clause of the verse, 'Inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.' Translate that into distinct propositions, and they are these: Faith refers to Christ; that is the first thing. Holiness depends on faith; that is the next: '*sanctified* by faith.' Heaven depends on holiness: that is the last: '*inheritance* among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.' So there we have the whole gospel!

To the one part of this comprehensive summary which is contained in my text I desire to turn now, in hope of gathering from it some truths as to that familiar word 'faith' which may be of use to us all. The expression is so often on our lips that it has come to be almost meaningless in many minds. These key-words of Scripture meet the same fate as do coins that have been long in circulation. They pass through so many fingers that the inscriptions get worn off them. We can all talk about faith and forgiveness and justifying and sanctifying, but how few of us have definite notions as to what these words that come so easily from our lips mean! There is a vast deal of cloudy haze in the minds of average church and chapel goers as to what this wonder-working faith may really be.

Perhaps we may then be able to see large and needful truths gleaming in these weighty syllables which Christ Jesus spoke from heaven to Paul, 'faith that is in Me.'

I. In the first place, then, the object of faith is Christ. 'Faith that is in Me' is that which is directed towards Christ as its object. Christianity is not merely a system of truths about God, nor a code of morality deducible from these. In its character of a revelation, it is the revelation of God in the person of His Son. Christianity in the soul is not the belief of these truths about God, still less the acceptance and practice of these pure ethics, but the affiance and the confidence of the whole spirit fixed upon the redeeming, revealing Christ.

True, the object of our faith is Christ as made known to us in the facts of His recorded life and the teaching of His Apostles. True, our only means of knowing Him as of any other person whom we have never seen, are the descriptions of Him, His character and work, which are given. True, the empty name 'Christ' has to be filled with the doctrinal and biographical statements of Scripture before the Person on whom faith is to fix can be apprehended or beheld. True, it is Christ as He is made known to us in the word of God, the Incarnate Son, the perfect Man, the atoning Sacrifice, the risen Lord, the ascended Intercessor in whom we have to trust. The characteristics and attributes of Christ are known to us only by biographical statements and by doctrinal propositions. These must be understood in some measure and accepted, ere there can be faith in Him. Apart from them, the image of Christ must stand a pale, colourless phantom before the mind, and the faith which is directed towards such a nebula will be an unintelligent emotion, as nebulous and impotent as the vagueness towards which it turns.

Thus far, then, the attempt which is sometimes made to establish a Christianity without doctrines on the plea that the object of faith is not a proposition, but a person, must be regarded as nugatory; for how can the 'person' be an object of thought at all, but through the despised 'propositions'?

But while on the one hand it is true that Christ as revealed in these doctrinal statements of Scripture, the divine human Saviour, is the Object of faith, on the other hand it is to be remembered that it is He, and not the statements about Him, who is the Object.

Look at His own words. He does not merely say to us, 'Believe this, that, and the other thing about Me; put your credence in this and the other doctrine; accept this and the other promise; hope for this and the other future thing.' All these come with but are not the central act. He says, 'Believe: believe in Me! "*I* am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life": He that cometh to *Me* shall never hunger, and he that believeth in *Me* shall never thirst.' Do we rightly appreciate that? I think that if people firmly grasped this truth —that Christ is the Gospel, and that the Object of faith is not simply the truths that are recorded here in the word, but He with regard to whom these truths are recorded—it would clear away rolling wreaths of fog and mist from their perceptions. The whole feeling and attitude of a man's mind is different, according as he is trusting a person, or according as he is believing something about a person. And this, therefore, is the first broad truth that lies here. Faith has reference not merely to a doctrine, not to a system; but deeper than all these, to a living Lord—'faith that is *in Me*.'

I cannot help observing, before I go on—though it may be somewhat of a digression—what a strong inference with regard to the divinity of Christ is deducible from this first thought that He is the Object to whom faith has reference. If you look into the Old Testament, you will find constantly, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever'; 'Put thy trust in Jehovah!' There, too, though under the form of the Law, there, too, faith was the seed and germ of all religion. There, too, though under the hard husk of apparently external obedience and ceremonial sacrifices, the just lived by faith. Its object was the Jehovah of that ancient covenant. Religion has always been the same in every dispensation. At every time, that which made a man a devout man has been identically the same thing. It has always been true that it has been faith which has bound man to God, and given man hope. But when we come to the New Testament, the centre is shifted, as it would seem. What has become of the grand old words, 'Trust ye in the Lord Jehovah'? Look! Christ stands there, and says, 'Believe upon Me'! With calm, simple, profound dignity, He lays His hand upon all the ancient and consecrated words, upon all the ancient and hallowed emotions that used to set towards the unseen God between the cherubim, throned above judgment and resting upon mercy; and He says, 'They are Mine—give them to Me! That ancient trust, I claim the right to have it. That old obedience, it belongs to Me. I am He to whom in all time the loving hearts of them that loved God, have set. I am the Angel of the Covenant, in whom whoever trusteth shall never be confounded.' And I ask you just to take that one simple fact, that Christ thus steps, in the New Testament—in so far as the direction of the religious emotions of faith and love are concerned—that Christ steps into the place filled by the Jehovah of the Old; and ask yourselves honestly what theory of Christ's nature and person and work explains that fact, and saves Him from the charge of folly and blasphemy? 'He that believeth upon Me shall never hunger.' Ah, my brother! He was no mere *man* who said that. He that spake from out of the cloud to the Apostle on the road to Damascus, and said, 'Sanctified by faith that is in Me,' was no mere *man*. Christ was our brother and a man, but He was the Son of God, the divine Redeemer. The Object of faith is Christ; and as Object of faith He must needs be divine.

II. And now, secondly, closely connected with and springing from this thought as to the true object of faith, arises the consideration as to the nature and the essence of the act of faith itself.

Whom we are to trust in we have seen: what it is to *have* faith may be very briefly stated. If the Object of faith were certain truths, the assent of the understanding would be enough. If the Object of faith were unseen things, the confident persuasion of them would be sufficient. If the Object of faith were promises of future good, the hope rising to certainty of the possession of these would be sufficient. But if the Object be more than truths, more than unseen realities, more than promises; if the Object be a living Person,—then there follows inevitably this, that faith is not merely the assent of the understanding, that faith is not merely the persuasion of the reality of unseen things, that faith is not merely the confident expectation of future good; but that faith is the personal relation of him who has it to the living Person its Object,—the relation which is expressed not more clearly, but perhaps a little more forcibly to us, by substituting another word, and saying, Faith is *trust*.

And I think that there again, by laying hold of that simple principle, Because Christ is the Object of Faith, therefore Faith must be trust, we get bright and beautiful light upon the grandest truths of the Gospel of God. If we will only take that as our explanation, we have not indeed defined faith by substituting the other word for it, but we have made it a little more clear to our apprehensions, by using a non-theological word with which our daily acts teach us to connect an intelligible meaning. If we will only take that as our explanation, how simple, how grand, how familiar too it sounds,—to *trust* Him! It is the very same kind of feeling, though different in degree, and glorified by the majesty and glory of its Object, as that which we all know how to put forth in our relations with one another. We trust each other. That is faith. We have confidence in the love that has been around us, breathing benedictions and bringing blessings ever since we were little children. When the child looks up into the mother's face, the symbol to it of all protection, or into the father's eye, the symbol to it of all authority, —that emotion by which the little one hangs upon the loving hand and trusts the loving heart that towers above it in order to bend over it and scatter good, is the same as the one which, glorified and made divine, rises strong and immortal in its power, when fixed and fastened on Christ, and saves the soul. The Gospel rests upon a mystery, but the practical part of it is no mystery. When we come and preach to you, 'Trust in Christ and thou shalt be saved,' we are not asking you to put into exercise some mysterious power. We are only asking you to give to Him that which you give to others, to transfer the old emotions, the blessed emotions, the exercise of which makes gladness in life here below, to transfer them to Him, and to rest safe in the Lord. Faith is trust. The living Person as its Object rises before us there, in His majesty, in His power, in His gentleness, and He says, 'I shall be contented if thou wilt give to Me these emotions which thou dost fix now, to thy death and loss, on the creatures of a day.' Faith is mighty, divine, the gift of God; but Oh! it is the exercise of a familiar habit, only fixed upon a divine and eternal Person.

And if this be the very heart and kernel of the Christian doctrine of faith—that it is simple personal trust in Jesus Christ; it is worthy of notice, how all the subsidiary meanings and uses of the word flow out of that, whilst it cannot be explained by any of them. People are in the habit of setting up antitheses betwixt faith and reason, betwixt faith and sight, betwixt faith and possession. They say, 'We do not *know*, we must *believe*'; they say, 'We do not *see*, we must have faith'; they say, 'We do not *possess*, we must trust.' Now faith—the trust in Christ—the simple personal relation of confidence in Him—*that* lies beneath all these other meanings of the word. For instance, faith is, in one sense, the opposite and antithesis of sight; because Christ, unseen, having gone into the unseen world, the confidence which is directed towards Him must needs pass out beyond the region of sense, and fix upon the immortal verities that are veiled by excess of light at God's right hand. Faith is the opposite of sight; inasmuch as Christ, having given us assurance of an unseen and everlasting world, we, trusting in Him, believe what He says to us, and are persuaded and know that there are things yonder which we have never seen with the eye nor handled with the hand. Similarly, faith is the completion of reason; because, trusting Christ, we believe what He says, and He has spoken to us truths which we in ourselves are unable to discover, but which, when revealed, we accept on the faith of His truthfulness, and because we rely upon Him. Similarly, faith is contrasted with present possession, because Christ has promised us future blessings and future glories; and having confidence in the Person, we believe what He says, and know that we shall possess them. But the root from which spring the power of faith as the opposite of sight, the power of faith as the telescope of reason, the power of faith as the 'confidence of things not possessed,' is the deeper thing—faith in the Person, which leads us to believe Him whether He promises, reveals, or commands, and to take His words as verity because He *is* 'the Truth.'

And then, again, if this, the personal trust in Christ as our living Redeemer—if this be faith, then there come also, closely connected with it, certain other emotions or feelings in the heart. For instance, if I am trusting to Christ, there is inseparably linked with it self-distrust. There are two sides to the emotion; where there is reliance upon another, there must needs be non-reliance upon self. Take an illustration. There is the tree: the trunk goes upward from the little seed, rises into the light, gets the sunshine upon it, and has leaves and fruit. That is the upward tendency of faith—trust in Christ. There is the root, down deep, buried dark, unseen. Both are springing, but springing in opposite directions, from the one seed. That is, as it were, the negative side, the downward tendency—self-distrust. The two things go together—the positive reliance upon another, the negative distrust of myself.

There must be deep consciousness not only of my own impotence, but of my own sinfulness. The heart must be emptied that the seed of faith may grow; but the entrance in of faith is itself the means for the emptying of the heart. The two things co-exist; we can divide them in thought. We can wrangle and squabble, as divided sects have done, about which comes first, the fact being, that though you can part them in thought, you cannot part them in experience, inasmuch as they are but the obverse and the reverse, the two sides of the same coin. Faith and repentance—faith and self-distrust—they are done in one and the same indissoluble act.

And again, faith, as thus conceived of, will obviously have for its certain and immediate consequence, love. Nay, the two emotions will be inseparable and practically co-existent. In thought we can separate them. Logically, faith comes first, and love next, but in life they will spring up together. The question of their order of existence is an often-trod battle-ground of theology, all strewed with the relics of former fights. But in the real history of the growth of religious emotions in the soul, the interval which separates them is impalpable, and in every act of trust, love is present, and fundamental to every emotion of love to Christ is trust in Christ.

But without further reference to such matters, here is the broad principle of our text. Trust in Christ, not mere assent to a principle, personal dependence upon Him revealed as the 'Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,' an act of the will as well as of the understanding, and essentially an act of the will and not of the understanding—that is the thing by which a soul is saved. And much of the mist and confusion about saving faith, and non-saving faith, might be lifted and dispersed if we once fully apprehended and firmly held by the divine simplicity of the truth, that faith is trust in Jesus Christ.

III. Once more: from this general definition there follows, in the third place, an explanation of the power of faith.

'We are justified,' says the Bible, 'by faith.' If a man believes, he is saved. Why so? Not, as some people sometimes seem to fancy, as if in faith itself there was any merit. There is a very strange and subtle resurrection of the whole doctrine of works in reference to this matter; and we often hear belief in the Gospel of Christ spoken about as if *it*, the work of the man believing, was, in a certain way and to some extent, that which God rewarded by giving him salvation. What is that but the whole doctrine of works come up again in a new form? What difference is there between what a man does with his hands and what a man feels in his heart? If the one merit salvation, or if the other merit salvation, equally we are shut up to this,—Men get heaven by what they do; and it does not matter a bit what they do it with, whether it be body or soul. When we say we are saved by faith, we mean accurately, *through* faith. It is God that saves. It is Christ's life, Christ's blood, Christ's sacrifice, Christ's intercession, that saves. Faith is simply the channel through which there flows over into my emptiness the divine fulness; or, to use the good old illustration, it is the hand which is held up to receive the benefit which Christ lays in it. A living trust in Jesus has power unto salvation, only because it is the means by which 'the power of God unto salvation' may come into my heart. On one side is the great ocean of Christ's love, Christ's abundance, Christ's merits, Christ's righteousness; or, rather, there is the great ocean of Christ Himself, which includes them all; and on the other is the empty vessel of my soul—and the little narrow pipe that has nothing to do but to bring across the refreshing water, is the act of faith in Him. There is no merit in the dead lead, no virtue in the mere emotion. It is not faith that saves us; it is Christ that saves us, and saves us through faith.

And now, lastly, these principles likewise help us to understand wherein consists the guilt and criminality of unbelief. People are sometimes disposed to fancy that God has arbitrarily selected this one thing, believing in Jesus Christ, as the means of salvation, and do not distinctly see why and how non-belief is so desperate and criminal a thing. I think that the principles that I have been trying feebly to work out now, help us to see how faith is not arbitrarily selected as the instrument and means of our salvation. There is no other way of effecting it. God could not save us in any other way than that, salvation being provided, the condition of receiving it should be trust in His Son.

And next they show where the guilt of unbelief lies. Faith is not first and principally an act of the understanding; it is not the mere assent to certain truths. I believe, for my part, that men are responsible even for their intellectual processes, and for the beliefs at which they arrive by the working of these; and I think it is a very shallow philosophy that stands up and says—(it is almost exploded now, and perhaps not needful even to mention it)—that men are 'no more responsible for their belief than they are for the colour of their hair.' Why, if faith were no more than an intellectual process, it would still be true that they are responsible for it; but the faith that saves a man, and unbelief that ruins a man, are not processes of the understanding alone. It is the will, the heart, the whole moral being, that is concerned. Why does any one not trust Jesus Christ? For one reason only: because *he will not.* Why has any one not faith in the Lamb of God? Because his whole nature is turning away from that divine and loving Face, and is setting itself in rebellion against it. Why does any one refuse to believe? Because he has confidence in himself; because he has not a sense of his sins; because he has not love in his heart to his Lord and Saviour. Men *are* responsible for unbelief. Unbelief is criminal, because it is a moral act—an act of the whole nature. Belief or unbelief is the test of a man's whole spiritual condition, just because it is the whole being, affections, will, conscience and all, as well as the understanding, which are concerned in it. And therefore Christ, who says, 'Sanctified by faith that is in Me,' says likewise, 'He that believeth not, shall be condemned.'

And now, brethren, take this one conviction into your hearts, that what makes a man a Christian—what saves my soul and yours—what brings the love of Christ into any life, and makes the sacrifice of Christ a power to pardon and purify,—that that is not merely believing this Book, not merely understanding the doctrines that are there, but a far more profound act than that. It is the casting of myself upon Himself, the bending of my willing heart to His loving Spirit; the close contact, heart to heart, soul to soul, will to will, of my emptiness with His fulness, of my sinfulness with His righteousness, of my death with His life: that I may live by Him, be sanctified by Him, be saved by Him, 'with an everlasting salvation.' Faith is trust: Christ is the Object of faith. Faith is the condition of salvation; and unbelief is your fault, your loss—the crime which ruins men's souls!

'BEFORE GOVERNORS AND KINGS'

'Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20. But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judæa, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. 21. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. 22. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come; 23. That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. 24. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. 25. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. 26. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. 27. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. 28. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. 29. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. 30. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: 31. And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. 32. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.'—ACTS xxvi. 19-32.

FESTUS was no model of a righteous judge, but he had got hold of the truth as to Paul, and saw that what he contemptuously called 'certain questions of their own superstition,' and especially his assertion of the Resurrection, were the real crimes of the Apostle in Jewish eyes. But the fatal wish to curry favour warped his course, and led him to propose a removal of the 'venue' to Jerusalem. Paul knew that to return thither would seal his death-warrant, and was therefore driven to appeal to Rome.

That took the case out of Festus's jurisdiction. So that the hearing before Agrippa was an entertainment, got up for the king's diversion, when other amusements had been exhausted, rather than a regular judicial proceeding. Paul was examined 'to make a Roman holiday.' Festus's speech (chap. xxv. 24-27) tries to put on a colour of desire to ascertain more clearly the charges, but that is a very thin pretext. Agrippa had said that he would like 'to hear the man,' and so the performance was got up 'by request.' Not a very sympathetic audience fronted Paul that day. A king and his sister, a Roman governor, and all the *élite* of Cæsarean society, ready to take their cue from the faces of these three, did not daunt Paul. The man who had seen Jesus on the Damascus road could face 'small and great.'

The portion of his address included in the passage touches substantially the same points as did his previous 'apologies.' We may note how strongly he puts the force that impelled him on his course, and lays bare the secret of his life. 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision'; then the possibility of disobedience was open after he had heard Christ ask, 'Why persecutest thou Me?' and had received commands from His mouth. Then, too, the essential character of the charge against him was that, instead of kicking against the owner's goad, he had bowed his neck to his yoke, and that his obstinate will had melted. Then, too, the 'light above the brightness of the sun' still shone round him, and his whole life was one long act of obedience.

We note also how he sums up his work in verse 20, representing his mission to the Gentiles as but the last term in a continuous widening of his field, from Damascus to Jerusalem, from Jerusalem to Judæa (a phase of his activity not otherwise known to us, and for which, with our present records, it is difficult to find a place), from Judæa to the Gentiles. Step by step he had been led afield, and at each step the 'heavenly vision' had shone before him.

How superbly, too, Paul overleaps the distinction of Jew and Gentile, which disappeared to him in the unity of the broad message, which was the same to every man. Repentance, turning to God, works worthy of repentance, are as needful for Jew as for Gentile, and as open to Gentile as to Jew. What but universal can such a message be? To limit it would be to mutilate it.

We note, too, the calmness with which he lays his finger on the real cause of Jewish hate, which Festus had already found out. He does not condescend to rebut the charge of treason, which he had already repelled, and which nobody in his audience believed. He is neither afraid nor angry, as he quietly points to the deadly malice which had no ground but his message.

We further note the triumphant confidence in God and assurance of His help in all the past, so that, like some strong tower after the most crashing blows of the battering-ram, he still 'stands.' 'His steps had wellnigh slipped,' when foe after foe stormed against him, but 'Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.'

Finally, Paul gathers himself together, to leave as his last word the mighty sentence in which he condenses his whole teaching, in its aspect of witness-bearing, in its universal destination and identity to the poorest and to loftily placed men and women, such as sat languidly looking at him now, in its perfect concord with the earlier revelation, and in its threefold contents, that it was the message of the Christ who suffered, who rose from the dead, who was the Light of the world. Surely the promise was fulfilled to him, and it was 'given him in that hour what he should speak.'

The rustle in the crowd was scarcely over, when the strong masterful voice of the governor rasped out the coarse taunt, which, according to one reading, was made coarser (and more lifelike) by repetition, 'Thou art mad, Paul; thou art mad.' So did a hard 'practical man' think of that strain of lofty conviction, and of that story of the appearance of the Christ. To be in earnest about wealth or power or science or pleasure is not madness, so the world thinks; but to be in earnest about religion, one's own soul, or other people's, is. Which was the saner, Paul, who 'counted all things but dung that he might win Christ,' or Festus, who counted keeping his governorship, and making all that he could out of it, the one thing worth living for? Who is the madman, he who looks up and sees Jesus, and bows before Him for lifelong service, or he who looks up and says, 'I see nothing up there; I keep my eyes on the main chance down here'? It would be a saner and a happier world if there were more of us mad after Paul's fashion.

Paul's unruffled calm and dignity brushed aside the rude exclamation with a simple affirmation that his words were true in themselves, and spoken by one who had full command over his faculties; and then he turned away from Festus, who understood nothing, to Agrippa, who, at any rate, did understand a little. Indeed, Festus has to take the second place throughout, and it may have been the ignoring of him that nettled him. For all his courtesy to Agrippa, he knew that the latter was but a vassal king, and may have chafed at Paul's addressing him exclusively.

The Apostle has finished his defence, and now he towers above the petty dignitaries before him, and goes straight at the conscience of the king. Festus had dismissed the Resurrection of 'one Jesus' as unimportant: Paul asserted it, the Jews denied it. It was not worth while to ask which was right. The man was dead, that was agreed. If Paul said He was alive after death, that was only another proof of madness, and a Roman governor had more weighty things to occupy him than investigating such obscure and absurd trifles. But Agrippa, though not himself a Jew, knew enough of the history of the last twenty years to have heard about the Resurrection and the rise of the Church. No doubt he would have been ready to admit his knowledge, but Paul shows a disposition to come to closer quarters by his swift thrust, 'Believest thou the prophets?' and the confident answer which the questioner gives.

What was the Apostle bringing these two things—the publicity given to the facts of Christ's life, and the belief in the prophets—together for? Obviously, if Agrippa said Yes, then the next question would be, 'Believest thou the Christ, whose life and death and resurrection thou knowest, and who has fulfilled the prophets thereby?' That would have been a hard question for the king to answer. His conscience begins to be uncomfortable, and his dignity is wounded by this extremely rude person, who ventures to talk to him as if he were a mere common man. He has no better answer ready than a sarcasm; not a very forcible one, betraying, however, his penetration into, and his dislike of, and his embarrassment at, Paul's drift. His ironical words are no confession of being 'almost persuaded,' but a taunt. 'And do you really suppose that it is so easy a matter to turn me—the great Me, a Herod, a king,' and he might have added, a sensual bad man, 'into a Christian?'

Paul met the sarcastic jest with deep earnestness, which must have hushed the audience of sycophants ready to laugh with the king, and evidently touched him and Festus. His whole soul ran over in yearning desire for the salvation of them all. He took no notice of the gibe in the word *Christian*, nor of the levity of Agrippa. He showed that purest love fills his heart, that he has found the treasure which enriches the poorest and adds blessedness to the highest. So peaceful and blessed is he, a prisoner, that he can wish nothing better for any than to be like him in his faith. He hints his willingness to take any pains and undergo any troubles for such an end; and, with almost a smile, he looks at his chains, and adds, 'except these bonds.'

Did Festus wince a little at the mention of these, which ought not to have been on his wrists? At all events, the entertainment had taken rather too serious a turn for the taste of any of the three,—Festus, Agrippa, or Bernice. If this strange man was going to shake their consciences in that fashion, it was high time to end what was, after all, as far as the rendering of justice was concerned, something like a farce.

So with a rustle, and amid the obeisances of the courtiers, the three rose, and, followed by the principal people, went through the form of deliberation. There was only one conclusion to be come to. He was perfectly innocent. So Agrippa solemnly pronounced, what had been known before, that he had done nothing worthy of death or bonds, though he had 'these bonds' on his arms; and salved the injustice of keeping an innocent man in custody by throwing all the blame on

Paul himself for appealing to Cæsar. But the person to blame was Festus, who had forced Paul to appeal in order to save his life.

'THE HEAVENLY VISION'

> 'Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.'
> ACTS xxvi. 19.

THIS is Paul's account of the decisive moment in his life on which all his own future, and a great deal of the future of Christianity and of the world, hung. The gracious voice had spoken from heaven, and now everything depended on the answer made in the heart of the man lying there blind and amazed. Will he rise melted by love, and softened into submission, or hardened by resistance to the call of the exalted Lord? The somewhat singular expression which he employs in the text, makes us spectators of the very process of his yielding. For it might be rendered, with perhaps an advantage, 'I *became* not disobedient'; as if the 'disobedience' was the prior condition, from which we see him in the very act of passing, by the melting of his nature and the yielding of his will. Surely there have been few decisions in the world's history big with larger destinies than that which the captive described to Agrippa in the simple words: 'I became not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.'

I. Note, then, first, that this heavenly vision shines for us too.

Paul throughout his whole career looked back to the miraculous appearance of Jesus Christ in the heavens, as being equally available as valid ground for his

Christian convictions as were the appearances of the Lord in bodily form to the Eleven after His resurrection. And I may venture to work the parallel in the inverse direction, and to say to you that what we see and know of Jesus Christ is as valid a ground for our convictions, and as true and powerful a call for our obedience, as when the heaven was rent, and the glory above the midday sun bathed the persecutor and his followers on the stony road to Damascus. For the revelation that is made to the understanding and the heart, to the spirit and the will, is the same whether it be made, as it was to Paul, through a heavenly vision, or, as it was to the other Apostles, through the facts of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, which their senses certified to them, or, as it is to us, by the record of the same facts, permanently enshrined in Scripture. Paul's sight of Christ was for a moment; we can see Him as often and as long as we will, by turning to the pages of this Book. Paul's sight of Christ was accompanied with but a partial apprehension of the great and far-reaching truths which he was to learn and to teach, as embodied in the Lord whom he saw. To see Him was the work of a moment, to 'know Him' was the effort of a lifetime. We have the abiding results of the lifelong process lying ready to our hands in Paul's own letters, and we have not only the permanent record of Christ in the Gospels instead of the transient vision in the heavens, and the unfolding of the meaning and bearings of the historical facts, in the authoritative teaching of the Epistles, but we have also, in the history of the Church founded on these, in the manifest workings of a divine power for and through the company of believers, as well as in the correspondence between the facts and doctrines of

Christianity and the wants of humanity, a vision disclosed and authenticated as heavenly, more developed, fuller of meaning and more blessed to the eyes which see it, than that which was revealed to the persecutor as he reeled from his horse on the way to the great city.

Dear brethren, they who see Christ in the word, in the history of the world, in the pleading of the preacher, in the course of the ages, and who sometimes hear His voice in the warnings which He breathes into their consciences, and in the illuminations which He flashes on their understanding, need ask for no loftier, no more valid and irrefragable manifestation of His gracious self. To each of us this vision is granted. May I say, without seeming egotism to you it is granted even through the dark and cloudy envelope of my poor words?

II. The vision of Christ, howsoever perceived, comes demanding obedience.

The purpose for which Jesus Christ made Himself known to Paul was to give him a charge which should influence his whole life. And the manner in which the Lord, when He had appeared, prepared the way for the charge was twofold. He revealed Himself in His radiant glory, in His exalted being, in His sympathetic and mysterious unity with them that loved Him and trusted Him, in His knowledge of the doings of the persecutor; and He disclosed to Saul the inmost evil that lurked in his own heart, and showed him to his bewilderment and confusion, how the course that he thought to be righteousness and service was blasphemy and sin. So, by the manifestation of Himself enthroned omniscient, bound by the closest ties of identity and of sympathy with all that love Him, and by the disclosure of the amazed gazer's evil and sin, Jesus Christ opened the way for the charge which bore in its very heart an assurance of pardon, and was itself a manifestation of His love.

In like manner all heavenly visions are meant to secure human obedience. We have not done what God means us to do with any knowledge of Him which He grants, unless we utilise it to drive the wheels of life and carry it out into practice in our daily conduct. Revelation is not meant to satisfy mere curiosity or the idle desire to know. It shines above us like the stars, but, unlike them, it shines to be the guide of our lives. And whatsoever glimpse of the divine nature, or of Christ's love, nearness, and power, we have ever caught, was meant to bow our wills in glad submission, and to animate our hands for diligent service and to quicken our feet to run in the way of His commandments.

There is plenty of idle gazing, with more or less of belief, at the heavenly vision. I beseech you to lay to heart this truth, that Christ rends the heavens and shows us God, not that men may know, but that men may, knowing, do; and all His visions are the bases of commandments. So the question for us all is, What are we doing with what we know of Jesus Christ? Nothing? Have we translated our thoughts of Him into actions, and have we put all our actions under the control of our thoughts of Him? It is not enough that a man should say, 'Whereupon I *saw* the vision,' or, 'Whereupon I was *convinced* of the vision,' or, 'Whereupon I *understood* the vision.' Sight, apprehension, theology, orthodoxy, they are all very well, but the right result is, 'Whereupon I was *not disobedient* to the heavenly vision.' And unless your knowledge of Christ makes you do, and keep from doing, a thousand things, it is only an idle vision, which adds to your guilt.

But notice, in this connection, the peculiarity of the obedience which the vision requires. There is not a word, in this story of Paul's conversion, about the thing which Paul himself always puts in the foreground as the very hinge upon which conversion turns—viz. faith. Not a word. The name is not here, but the thing is here, if people will look. For the obedience which Paul says that he rendered to the vision was not rendered with his hands. He got up to his feet on the road there, 'not disobedient,' though he had not yet done anything. This is to say, the man's will had melted. It had all gone with a run, so to speak, and the inmost being of him was subdued. The obedience was the submission of self to God, and not the more or less diligent and continuous consequent external activity in the way of God's commandments.

Further, Paul's obedience is also an obedience based upon the vision of Jesus Christ enthroned, living, bound by ties that thrill at the slightest touch to all hearts that love Him, and making common cause with them.

And furthermore, it is an obedience based upon the shuddering recognition of Paul's own unsuspected evil and foulness, how all the life, that he had thought was being built up into a temple that God would inhabit, was rottenness and falsehood.

And it is an obedience, further, built upon the recognition of pity and pardon in Christ, who, after His sharp denunciation of the sin, looks down from Heaven with a smile of forgiveness upon His lips, and says: 'But rise and stand upon thy feet, for I will send thee to make known My name.'

An obedience which is the inward yielding of the will, which is all built upon the revelation of the living Christ, who was dead and is alive for evermore, and close to all His followers; and is, further, the thankful tribute of a heart that knows itself to be sinful, and is certain that it is forgiven—what is that but the obedience which is of faith? And thus, when I say that the heavenly vision demands obedience, I do not mean that Christ shows Himself to you to set you to work, but I mean that Christ shows Himself to you that you may yield yourselves to Him, and in the act may receive power to do all His sweet and sacred will.

III. Thirdly, this obedience is in our own power to give or to withhold.

Paul, as I said in my introductory remarks, puts us here as spectators of the very act of submission. He shows it to us in its beginning—he shows us the state from which he came and that into which he passed, and he tells us, 'I *became*—not disobedient.' In his case it was a complete, swift, and permanent revolution, as if some thick-ribbed ice should all at once melt into sweet water. But whether swift or slow it was his own act, and after the Voice had spoken it was possible that Paul should have resisted and risen from the ground, not a servant, but a persecutor still. For God's grace constrains no man, and there is always the possibility open that when He calls we refuse, and that when He beseeches we say, 'I will not.'

There is the mystery on which the subtlest intellects have tasked their powers and blunted the edge of their keenness in all generations; and it is not likely to be settled in five minutes of a sermon of mine. But the practical point that I have to urge is simply this: there are two mysteries, the one that men *can*, and the other that men *do*, resist Christ's pleading voice.

As to the former, we cannot fathom it. But do not let any difficulty deaden to you the clear voice of your own consciousness. If I cannot trust my sense that I can do this thing or not do it, as I choose, there is nothing that I can trust. Will is the power of determining which of two roads I shall go, and, strange as it is, incapable of statement in any more general terms than the reiteration of the fact; yet here stands the fact, that God, the infinite Will, has given to men, whom He made in His own image, this inexplicable and awful power of coinciding with or opposing His purposes and His voice.

'Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine.'

For the other mystery is, that men *do* consciously set themselves against the will of God, and refuse the gifts which they know all the while are for their good. It is of no use to say that sin is ignorance. No; that is only a surface explanation. You and I know too well that many a time when we have been as sure of what God wanted us to do as if we had seen it written in flaming letters on the sky there, we have gone and done the exact opposite. I know that there are men and women who are convinced in their inmost souls that they ought to be Christians, and that Jesus Christ is pleading with them at the present hour, and yet in whose hearts there is no yielding to what, they yet are certain, is the will and voice of Jesus Christ.

IV. Lastly, this obedience may, in a moment, revolutionise a life.

Paul rode from Jerusalem 'breathing out threatenings and slaughters.' He fell from his warhorse, a persecutor of Christians, and a bitter enemy of Jesus. A few moments pass. There was one moment in which the crucial decision was made; and he staggered to his feet, loving all that he had hated, and abandoning all in which he had trusted. His own doctrine that 'if any man be in Christ he is a new creature, old things are passed away and all things are become new,' is but a generalisation of what befell himself on the Damascus road. It is of no use trying to say that there had been a warfare going on in this man's mind long before, of which his complete capitulation was only the final visible outcome. There is not a trace of anything of the kind in the story. It is a pure hypothesis pressed into the service of the anti-supernatural explanation of the fact.

There are plenty of analogies of such sudden and entire revolution. All reformation of a moral kind is best done quickly. It is a very hopeless task, as every one knows, to tell a drunkard to break off his habits gradually. There must be one moment in which he definitely turns himself round and sets his face in the other direction. Some things are best done with slow, continuous pressure; other things need to be done with a wrench if they are to be done at all.

There used to be far too much insistence upon one type of religious experience, and all men that were to be recognised as Christians were, by evangelical Nonconformists, required to be able to point to the moment when, by some sudden change, they passed from darkness to light. We have drifted away from that very far now, and there is need for insisting, not upon the necessity, but upon the possibility, of sudden conversions. However some may try to show that such experiences cannot be, the experience of every earnest Christian teacher can answer—well! whether they can be or not, they are. Jesus Christ cured two men gradually, and all the others instantaneously. No doubt, for young people who have been born amidst Christian influences, and have grown up in Christian households, the usual way of becoming Christians is that slowly and imperceptibly they shall pass into the consciousness of communion with Jesus Christ. But for people who have grown up irreligious and, perhaps, profligate and sinful, the most probable way is a sudden stride out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son. So I come to you all with this message. No matter what your past, no matter how much of your life may have ebbed away, no matter how deeply rooted and obstinate may be your habits of evil, no matter how often you may have tried to mend yourself and have failed, it is possible by one swift act of surrender to break the chains and go free. In every man's life there have been moments into which years have been crowded, and which have put a wider gulf between his past and his present self than many slow, languid hours can dig. A great sorrow, a great joy, a great, newly discerned truth, a great resolve will make 'one day as a thousand years.' Men live through such moments and feel that the past is swallowed up as by an earthquake. The highest instance of thus making time elastic and crowding it with meaning is when a man forms and keeps the swift resolve to yield himself to Christ. It may be the work of a moment, but it makes a gulf between past and future, like that which parted the time before and the time after that in which 'God said, Let there be light: and there was light.' If you have never yet bowed before the heavenly vision and yielded yourself as conquered by the love which pardons, to be the glad servant of the Lord Jesus who takes all His servants into wondrous oneness with Himself, do it now. You can do it. Delay is disobedience, and may be death. Do it now, and your whole life will be changed. Peace and joy and power will come to you, and you, made a new man, will move in a new world of new relations, duties, energies, loves, gladnesses, helps, and hopes. If you take heed to prolong the point into a line, and hour by hour to renew the surrender and the cry, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' you will ever have the vision of the Christ enthroned, pardoning, sympathising, and commanding, which will fill your sky with glory, point the path of your feet, and satisfy your gaze with His beauty, and your heart with His all-sufficing and ever-present love.

'ME A CHRISTIAN!'

'Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.
ACTS xxvi. 28.

THIS Agrippa was son of the other Herod of whom we hear in the Acts as a persecutor. This one appears from other sources, to have had the vices but not the force of character of his bad race. He was weak and indolent, a mere hanger-on of Rome, to which he owed his kingdom, and to which he stoutly stuck during all the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem. In position and in character (largely resulting from the position) he was uncommonly like those semi-independent rajahs in India, who are allowed to keep up a kind of shadow of authority on condition of doing what Calcutta bids them. Of course frivolity and debauchery become the business of such men. What sort of a man this was may be sufficiently inferred from the fact that Bernice was his sister.

But he knew a good deal about the Jews, about their opinions, their religion, and about what had been going on during the last half century amongst them. On grounds of policy he professed to accept the Jewish faith—of which an edifying example is given in the fact that, on one occasion, Bernice was prevented from accompanying him to Rome because she was fulfilling a Nazarite vow in the Temple at Jerusalem!

So the Apostle was fully warranted in appealing to Agrippa's knowledge, not only of Judaism, but of the history of Jesus Christ, and in his further assertion, 'I know that thou believest.' But the home-thrust was too much for the king. His answer is given in the words of our text.

They are very familiar words, and they have been made the basis of a great many sermons upon being all but persuaded to accept of Christ as Saviour. But, edifying as such a use of them is, it can scarcely be sustained by their actual meaning. Most commentators are agreed that our Authorised Version does not represent either Agrippa's words or his tone. He was not speaking in earnest. His words are sarcasm, not a half melting into conviction, and the Revised Version gives what may, on the whole, be accepted as being a truer representation of their intention when it reads, 'With but little persuasion thou wouldst fain make me a Christian.'

He is half amused and half angry at the Apostle's presumption in supposing that so easily or so quickly he was going to land his fish. 'It is a more difficult task than you fancy, Paul, to make a Christian of a man like me.' That is the real meaning of his words, and I think that, rightly understood, they yield lessons of no less value than those that have been so often drawn from them as they appear in our Authorised Version. So I wish to try and gather up and urge upon you now these lessons:—

I. First, then, I see here an example of the danger of a superficial familiarity with Christian truth.

As I said, Agrippa knew, in a general way, a good deal not only about the prophets and the Jewish religion, but of the outstanding facts of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul's assumption that he knew would have been very quickly repudiated if it had not been based upon fact. And the inference from his acceptance without contradiction of the Apostle's statement is confirmed by his use of the word 'Christian,' which had by no means come into general employment when he spoke; and in itself indicates that he knew a good deal about the people who were so named. Mark the contrast, for instance, between him and the bluff Roman official at his side. To Festus, Paul's talking about a dead man's having risen, and a risen Jew becoming a light to all nations, was such utter nonsense that, with characteristic Roman contempt for men with ideas, he breaks in, with his rough, strident voice, 'Much learning has made thee mad.' There was not much chance of that cause producing that effect on Festus. But he was apparently utterly bewildered at this entirely novel and unintelligible sort of talk. Agrippa, on the other hand, knows all about the Resurrection; has heard that there was such a thing, and has a general rough notion of what Paul believed as a Christian.

And was he any better for it? No; he was a great deal worse. It took the edge off a good deal of his curiosity. It made him fancy that he knew beforehand all that the Apostle had to say. It stood in the way of his apprehending the truths which he thought that he understood.

And although the world knows a great deal more about Jesus Christ and the Gospel than he did, the very same thing is true about hundreds and thousands of people who have all their lives long been brought into contact with Christianity. Superficial knowledge is the worst enemy of accurate knowledge, for the first condition of knowing a thing is to know that we do not know it. And so there are a great many of us who, having picked up since childhood vague and partially inaccurate notions about Christ and His Gospel and what He has done, are so satisfied on the strength of these that we know all about it, that we listen to preaching about it with a very languid attention. The ground in our minds is preoccupied with our own vague and imperfect apprehensions. I believe that there is nothing that stands more in the way of hundreds of people coming into real intelligent contact with Gospel truth than the half knowledge that they have had of it ever since they were children. You fancy that you know all that I can tell you. Very probably you do. But have you ever taken a firm hold of the plain central facts of Christianity—your own sinfulness and helplessness, your need of a Saviour, the perfect work of Jesus Christ who died on the Cross for you, and the power of simple faith therein to join you to Him, and, if followed by consecration and obedience, to make you partakers of His nature, and heirs of the inheritance that is above? These are but the fundamentals, the outlines of

Gospel truth. But far too many of you see them, in such a manner as you see the figures cast upon a screen when the lantern is not rightly focussed, with a blurred outline, and the blurred outline keeps you from seeing the sharp-cut truth as it is in Jesus In all regions of thought inaccurate knowledge is the worst foe to further understanding, and eminently is this the case in religion. Brethren, some of you are in that position.

Then there is another way in which such knowledge as that of which the king in our text is an example is a hindrance, and that is, that it is knowledge which has no effect on character. What do hundreds of us do with our knowledge of Christianity? Our minds seem built in watertight compartments, and we keep the doors of them shut very close, so that truths in the understanding have no influence on the will. Many of you believe the Gospel intellectually, and it does not make a hairsbreadth of difference to anything that you ever either thought or wished or did. And because you so believe it, it is utterly impossible that it should ever be of any use to you. 'Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.' 'Yes, believest the prophets, and Bernice sitting by thy side there—believest the prophets, and livest in utter bestial godlessness.' What is the good of a knowledge of Christianity like that? And is it not such knowledge of Christianity that blocks the way with some of you for anything more real and more operative? There is nothing more impotent than a firmly believed and utterly neglected truth. And that is what the Christianity of some of you is when it is analysed.

II. Now, secondly, notice how we have here the example of a proud man indignantly recoiling from submission.

There is a world of contempt in Agrippa's words, in the very putting side by side of the two things. 'Me! *Me,*' with a very large capital M—'Me a Christian?' He thinks of his dignity, poor creature. It was not such a very tremendous dignity after all. He was a petty kinglet, permitted by the grace of Rome to live and to pose as if he were the real thing, and yet he struts and claps his wings and crows on his little hillock as if it were a mountain. '*Me* a Christian?' 'The great Agrippa a *Christian*!' And he uses that word 'Christian' with the intense contempt which coined it and adhered to it, until the men to whom it was applied were wise enough to take it and bind it as a crown of honour upon their head. The wits at Antioch first of all hit upon the designation. They meant a very exquisite piece of sarcasm by their nickname. These people were 'Christians,' just as some other people were Herodians—Christ's men, the men of this impostor who pretended to be a Messiah. That seemed such an intensely ludicrous thing to the wise people in Antioch that they coined the name; and no doubt thought they had done a very clever thing. It is only used in the Bible in the notice of its origin; here, with a very evident connotation of contempt; and once more when Peter in his letter refers to it as being the indictment on which certain disciples suffered. So when Agrippa says, 'Me a Christian,' he puts all the bitterness that he can into that last word. As if he said, 'Do you really think that I—I—am going to bow myself down to be a follower and adherent of that Christ of yours? The thing is too ridiculous! With but little persuasion you would fain make me a Christian. But you will find it a harder task than you fancy.'

Now, my dear friends, the shape of this unwillingness is changed but the fact of it remains. There are two or three features of what I take to be the plain Gospel of Jesus Christ which grate very much against all self-importance and self-complacency, and operate very largely, though not always consciously, upon very many amongst us. I just run them over, very briefly.

The Gospel insists on dealing with everybody in the same fashion, and on regarding all as standing on the same level. Many of us do not like that. Translate Agrippa's scorn into words that fit ourselves: 'I am a well-to-do Manchester man. Am I to stand on the same level as my office-boy?' Yes! the very same. 'I, a student, perhaps a teacher of science, or a cultivated man, a scholar, a lawyer, a professional man—am I to stand on the same level as people that scarcely know how to read and write?' Yes, exactly. So, like the man in the Old Testament, 'he turned and went away in a rage.' Many of us would like that there should be a little private door for us in consideration of our position or acquirements or respectability, or this, that, or the other thing. At any rate we are not to be classed in the same category with the poor and the ignorant and the sinful and the savage all over the world. But we are so classed. Do not you and the men in Patagonia breathe the same air? Are not your bodies subject to the same laws? Have you not to be contented to be fed in the same fashion, and to sleep and eat and drink in the same way? 'We have all of us one human heart'; and 'there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' The identities of humanity, in all its examples, are deeper than the differences in any. We have all the one Saviour and are to be saved in the same fashion. That is a humbling thing for those of us who stand upon some little elevation, real or fancied, but it is only the other side of the great truth that God's love is world-wide, and that Christ's Gospel is meant for humanity. Naaman, to whom I have already referred in passing, wanted to be treated as a great man who happened to be a leper; Elisha insisted on treating him as a leper who happened to be a great man. And that makes all the difference. I remember seeing somewhere that a great surgeon had said that the late Emperor of Germany would have had a far better chance of being cured if he had gone *incognito* to the hospital for throat diseases. We all need the same surgery, and we must be contented to take it in the same fashion. So, some of us recoil from humbling equality with the lowest and worst.

Then again, another thing that sometimes makes people shrink back from the Gospel is that it insists upon every one being saved solely by dependence on Another. We would like to have a part in our salvation, and many of us had rather do anything in the way of sacrifice or suffering or penance than take this position:

> 'Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to Thy Cross I cling.'

Corrupt forms of Christianity have taken an acute measure of the worst parts of human nature, when they have taught men that they can eke out Christ's work by their own, and have some kind of share in their own salvation. Dear brethren, I have to bring to you another Gospel than that, and to say, All is done for us, and all will be done in us, and nothing has to be done by us. Some of you do not like that. Just as a man drowning is almost sure to try to help himself, and get his limbs inextricably twisted round his would-be rescuer and drown them both, so men will not, without a struggle, consent to owe everything to Jesus Christ, and to let Him draw them out of many waters and set them on the safe shore. But unless we do so, we have little share in His Gospel.

And another thing stands in the way—namely, that the Gospel insists upon absolute obedience to Jesus Christ. Agrippa fancied that it was an utterly preposterous idea that he should lower his flag, and doff his crown, and become the servant of a Jewish peasant. A great many of us, though we have a higher idea of our Lord than his, do yet find it quite as hard to submit our wills to His, and to accept the condition of absolute obedience, utter resignation to Him, and entire subjection to His commandment. We say, 'Let my own will have a little bit of play in a corner.' Some of us find it very hard to believe that we are to bring all our thinking upon religious and moral subjects to Him, and to accept His word as conclusive, settling all controversies. 'I, with my culture; am I to accept what Christ says as the end of strife?' Yes, absolute submission is the plainest condition of real Christianity. The very name tells us that. We are Christians, *i.e.* Christ's men; and unless we are, we have no right to the name. But some of us had rather be our own masters and enjoy the miseries of independence and self-will, and so be the slaves of our worse selves, than bow ourselves utterly before that dear

Lord, and so pass into the freedom of a service love-inspired, and by love accepted. 'Thou wouldst fain persuade *me* to be a *Christian*,' is the recoil of a proud heart from submission. Brethren, let me beseech you that it may not be yours.

III. Again, we have here an example of instinctive shrinking from the personal application of broad truths.

Agrippa listened, half-amused and a good deal interested, to Paul as long as he talked generalities and described his own experience. But when he came to point the generalities and to drive them home to the hearer's heart it was time to stop him. That question of the Apostle's, keen and sudden as the flash of a dagger, went straight home, and the king at once gathered himself together into an attitude of resistance. Ah, that is what hundreds of people do! You will let me preach as long as I like—only you will get a little weary sometimes—you will let me preach generalities *ad libitum*. But when I come to 'And thou?' then I am 'rude' and 'inquisitorial' and 'personal' and 'trespassing on a region where I have no business,' and so on and so on. And so you shut up your heart if not your ears.

And yet, brethren, what is the use of toothless generalities? What am I here for if I am not here to take these broad, blunt truths and sharpen them to a point, and try to get them in between the joints of your armour? Can any man faithfully preach the Gospel who is always flying over the heads of his hearers with universalities, and never goes straight to their hearts with 'Thou—thou art the man!' 'Believest *thou*?'

And so, dear friends, let me press that question upon you. Never mind about other people. Suppose you and I were alone together and my words were coming straight *to thee.* Would they not have more power than they have now? They are so coming. Think away all these other people, and this place, ay, and me too, and let the word of Christ, which deals with no crowds but with single souls, come to you in its individualising force: 'Believest *thou*?' You will have to answer that question one day. Better to face it now and try to answer it than to leave it all vague until you get yonder, where 'each one of us shall give account of *himself* to God.'

IV. Lastly, we have here an example of a soul close to the light, but passing into the dark.

Agrippa listens to Paul; Bernice listens; Festus listens. And what comes of it? Only this, 'And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man hath done nothing worthy of death or of bonds.' May I translate into a modern equivalent: And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, 'This man preached a very impressive sermon,' or, 'This man preached a very wearisome sermon,' and there an end.

Agrippa and Bernice went their wicked way, and Festus went his, and none of them knew what a fateful moment they had passed through. Ah, brethren! there are many such in our lives when we make decisions that influence our whole future, and no sign shows that the moment is any way different from millions of its undistinguished fellows. It is eminently so in regard to our relation to Jesus Christ and His Gospel. These three had been in the light; they were never so near it again. Probably they never heard the Gospel preached any more, and they went away, not knowing what they had done when they silenced Paul and left him. Now you will probably hear plenty of sermons in future. You may or you may not. But be sure of this, that if you go away from this one, unmelted and unbelieving, you have not done a trivial thing. You have added one more stone to the barrier that you yourself build to shut you out from holiness and happiness, from hope and heaven. It is not I that ask you the question, it is not Paul that asks it, Jesus Christ Himself says to you, as He said to the blind man, 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' or as He said to the weeping sister of Lazarus, 'Believest thou this?' O dear friends, do not answer like this arrogant bit of a king, but cry with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!'

TEMPEST AND TRUST

And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. 14. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. 15. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. 16. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: 17. Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. 18. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; 19. And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. 20. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. 21. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. 22. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. 23. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24. Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. 25. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. 26. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.'—ACTS xxvii. 13-26.

LUKE'S minute account of the shipwreck implies that he was not a Jew. His interest in the sea and familiarity with sailors' terms are quite unlike a persistent Jewish characteristic which still continues. We have a Jew's description of a storm at sea in the Book of Jonah, which is as evidently the work of a landsman as Luke's is of one who, though not a sailor, was well up in maritime matters. His narrative lays hold of the essential points, and is as accurate as it is vivid. This section has two parts: the account of the storm, and the grand example of calm trust and cheery encouragement given in Paul's words.

I. The consultation between the captain of the vessel and the centurion, at which Paul assisted, strikes us, with our modern notions of a captain's despotic power on his own deck, and single responsibility, as unnatural. But the centurion, as a military officer, was superior to the captain of an Alexandrian corn-ship, and Paul had already made his force of character so felt that it is not wonderful that he took part in the discussion. Naturally the centurion was guided by the professional rather than by the amateur member of the council, and the decision was come to to push on as far and fast as possible.

The ship was lying in a port which gave scanty protection against the winter weather, and it was clearly wise to reach a more secure harbour if possible. So when a gentle southerly breeze sprang up, which would enable them to make such a port, westward from their then position, they made the attempt. For a time it looked as if they would succeed, but they had a great headland jutting out in front which they must get round, and their ability to do this was doubtful. So they kept close in shore and weathered the point. But before they had made their harbour the wind suddenly chopped round, as is frequent off that coast, and the gentle southerly breeze turned into a fierce squall from the north-east or thereabouts, sweeping down from the Cretan mountains. That began their troubles. To make the port was impossible. The unwieldy vessel could not 'face the wind,' and so they had to run before it. It would carry them in a south-westerly direction, and towards a small island, under the lee of which they might hope for some shelter. Here they had a little breathing time, and could make things rather more ship-shape than they had been able to do when suddenly caught by the squall. Their boat had been towing behind them, and had to be hoisted on deck somehow.

A more important, and probably more difficult, task was to get strong hawsers under the keel and round the sides, so as to help to hold the timbers together The third thing was the most important of all, and has been misunderstood by commentators who knew more about Greek lexicons than ships. The most likely explanation of 'lowering the gear' (Rev. Ver.) is that it means 'leaving up just enough of sail to keep the ship's head to the wind, and bringing down everything else that could be got down' (Ramsay, *St. Paul*, p. 329).

Note that Luke says 'we' about hauling in the boat, and 'they' about the other tasks. He and the other passengers could lend a hand in the former, but not in the latter, which required more skilled labour. The reason for bringing down all needless top-hamper, and leaving up a little sail, was to keep the vessel from driving on to the great quicksands off the African coast, to which they would certainly have been carried if the wind held.

As soon as they had drifted out from the lee of the friendly little island they were caught again in the storm. They were in danger of going down. As they drifted they had their 'starboard' broadside to the force of the wild sea, and it was a question how long the vessel's sides would last before they were stove in by the hammering of the waves, or how long she would be buoyant enough to ship seas without foundering. The only chance was to lighten her, so first the crew 'jettisoned' the cargo, and next day, as that did not give relief enough, 'they,' or, according to some authorities, 'we'—that is passengers and all—threw everything possible overboard.

That was the last attempt to save themselves, and after it there was nothing to do but to wait the apparently inevitable hour when they would all go down together. Idleness feeds despair, and despair nourishes idleness. Food was scarce, cooking it was impossible, appetite there was none. The doomed men spent the long idle days—which were scarcely day, so thick was the air with mist and foam and tempest—crouching anywhere for shelter, wet, tired, hungry, and hopeless. So they drifted 'for many days,' almost losing count of the length of time they had been thus. It was a gloomy company, but there was one man there in whom the lamp of hope burned when it had gone out in all others. Sun and stars were hidden, but Paul saw a better light, and *his* sky was clear and calm.

II. A common danger makes short work of distinctions of rank. In such a time some hitherto unnoticed man of prompt decision, resource, and confidence, will take the command, whatever his position. Hope, as well as timidity and fear, is infectious, and one cheery voice will revive the drooping spirits of a multitude. Paul had already established his personal ascendency in that motley company of Roman soldiers, prisoners, sailors, and disciples. Now he stands forward with calm confidence, and infuses new hope into them all. What a miraculous change passes on externals when faith looks at them! The circumstances were the same as they had been for many days. The wind was howling and the waves pounding as before, the sky was black with tempest, and no sign of help was in sight, but Paul spoke, and all was changed, and a ray of sunshine fell on the wild waters that beat on the doomed vessel.

Three points are conspicuous in his strong tonic words. First, there is the confident assurance of safety. A less noble nature would have said more in vindication of the wisdom of his former advice. It is very pleasant to small minds to say, 'Did I not tell you so? You see how right I was.' But the Apostle did not care for petty triumphs of that sort. A smaller man might have sulked because his advice had not been taken, and have said to himself, 'They would not listen to me before, I will hold my tongue now.' But the Apostle only refers to his former counsel and its confirmation in order to induce acceptance of his present words.

It is easy to 'bid' men 'be of good cheer,' but futile unless some reason for good cheer is given. Paul gave good reason. No man's life was to be lost though the ship was to go. He had previously predicted that life, as well as ship and lading, would be lost if they put to sea. That opinion was the result of his own calculation of probabilities, as he lets us understand by saying that he 'perceived' it (ver. 10). Now he speaks with authority, not from his perception, but from God's assurance. The bold words might well seem folly to the despairing crew as they caught them amidst the roar of tempest and looked at their battered hulk. So Paul goes at once to tell the ground of his confidence—the assurance of the angel of God.

What a contrast between the furious gale, the almost foundering ship, the despair in the hearts of the sleeping company, and the bright vision that came to Paul! Peter in prison, Paul in Cæsarea and now in the storm, see the angel form calm and radiant. God's messengers are wont to come into the darkest of our hours and the wildest of our tempests.

Paul's designation of the heavenly messenger as 'an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve,' recalls Jonah's confession of faith, but far surpasses it, in the sense of belonging to God, and in the ardour of submission and of active obedience, expressed in it. What Paul said to the Corinthians (1 Cor. vi. 19) he realised for himself: 'Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price.' To recognise that we are God's, joyfully to yield ourselves to Him, and with all the forces of our natures to serve Him, is to bring His angel to our sides in every hour of tempest and peril, and to receive assurance that nothing shall by any means harm us. To yield ourselves to be God's is to make God ours. It was because Paul owned that he belonged to God, and served Him, that the angel came to him, and he explains the vision to his hearers by his relation to God. Anything was possible rather than that his God should leave him unhelped at such an hour of need.

The angel's message must have included particulars unnoticed in Luke's summary; as, for instance, the wreck on 'a certain island.' But the two salient points in it are the certainty of Paul's own preservation, that the divine purpose of his appearing before Cæsar might be fulfilled, and the escape of all the ship's company. As to the former, we may learn how Paul's life, like every man's, is shaped according to a divine plan, and how we are 'immortal till our work is done,' and till God has done His work in and on and by us. As to the latter point, we may gather from the word 'has *given*' the certainty that Paul had been praying for the lives of all that sailed with him, and may learn, not only that the prayers of God's servants are a real element in determining God's dealings with men, but that a true servant of God's will ever reach out his desires and widen his prayers to embrace those with whom he is brought into contact, be they heathens, persecutors, rough and careless, or fellow-believers. If Christian people more faithfully discharged the duty of intercession, they would more frequently receive in answer the lives of 'all them that sail with' them over the stormy ocean of life.

The third point in the Apostle's encouraging speech is the example of his own faith, which is likewise an exhortation to the hearers to exercise the same. If God speaks by His angel with such firm promises, man's plain wisdom is to grasp the divine assurance with a firm hand. We must build rock upon rock. 'I believe God,' that surely is a credence demanded by common sense and warranted by the sanest reason. If we do so believe, and take His word as the infallible authority revealing present duty and future blessings, then, however lowering the sky, and wild the water, and battered the vessel, and empty of earthly succour the gloomy horizon, and heavy our hearts, we shall 'be of good cheer,' and in due time the event will warrant our faith in God and His promise, even though all around us seems to make our faith folly and our hope a mockery.

A SHORT CONFESSION OF FAITH

'. . . There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.'—ACTS xxvii. 23.

I TURN especially to those last words, 'Whose I am and whom I serve.'

A great calamity, borne by a crowd of men in common, has a wonderful power of dethroning officials and bringing the strong man to the front. So it is extremely natural, though it has been thought to be very unhistorical, that in this story of Paul's shipwreck he should become guide, counsellor, inspirer, and a tower of strength; and that centurions and captains and all the rest of those who held official positions should shrink into the background. The natural force of his character, the calmness and serenity that came from his faith—these things made him the leader of the bewildered crowd. One can scarcely help contrasting this shipwreck—the only one in the New Testament—with that in the Old Testament. Contrast Jonah with Paul, the guilty stupor of the one, down 'in the sides of the ship cowering before the storm, with the calm behaviour and collected courage of the other.

The vision of which the Apostle speaks does not concern us here, but in the words which I have read there are several noteworthy points. They bring vividly before us the essence of true religion, the bold confession which it prompts, and the calmness and security which it ensures. Let us then look at them from these points of view.

I. We note the clear setting forth of the essence of true religion.

Remember that Paul is speaking to heathens; that his present purpose is not to preach the Gospel, but to make his own position clear. So he says 'the God'—never mind who *He* is at present—'the God to whom I belong'—that covers all the inward life—'and whom I serve'—that covers all the outward.

'Whose I am.' That expresses the universal truth that men belong to God by virtue of their being the creatures of His hand. As the 100th Psalm says, according to one, and that a probably correct reading, 'It is He that hath made us, and *we are His*.' But the Apostle is going a good deal deeper than any such thoughts, which he, no doubt, shared in common with the heathen men around him, when he declares that, in a special fashion, God had claimed him for His, and he had yielded to the claim. 'I am Thine,' is the deepest thought of this man's mind and the deepest feeling of his heart. And that is godliness in its purest form, the consciousness of belonging to God. We must interpret this saying by others of the Apostle's, such as, 'Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your bodies and spirits which are His.' He traces God's possession of him, not to that fact of creation (which establishes a certain outward relationship, but nothing more), nor even to the continuous facts of benefits showered upon his head, but to the one transcendent act of the divine Love, which gave itself to us, and so acquired us for itself. For we must recognise as the deepest of all thoughts about the relations of spiritual beings, that, as in regard to ourselves in our earthly affections, so in regard to our relations with

God, there is only one way by which a spirit can own a spirit, whether it be a man on the one side and a woman on the other, or whether it be God on the one side and a man on the other, and that one way is by the sweetness of complete and reciprocal love. He who gives himself to God gets God for himself. So when Paul said, 'Whose I am,' he was thinking that he would never have belonged either to God or to himself unless, first of all, God, in His own Son, had given Himself to Paul. The divine ownership of us is only realised when we are consciously His, because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Brethren, God does not count that a man belongs to Him simply because He made him, if the man does not feel his dependence, his obligation, and has not surrendered himself. He in the heavens loves you and me too well to care for a formal and external ownership. He desires hearts, and only they who have yielded themselves unto God, moved thereto by the mercies of God, and especially by the encyclopædiacal mercy which includes all the rest in its sweep, only they belong to Him, in the estimate of the heavens.

And if you and I are His, then that involves that we have deposed from his throne the rebel Self, the ancient Anarch that disturbs and ruins us. They who belong to God cease to live to themselves. There are two centres for human life, and I believe there are only two—the one is God, the other is my wretched self. And if we are swept, as it were, out of the little orbit that we move in, when the latter is our centre, and are drawn by the weight and mass of the great central sun to become its satellites, then we move in a nobler orbit and receive fuller and more blessed light and warmth. They who have themselves for their centres are like comets, with a wide elliptical course, which carries them away out into the cold abysses of darkness. They who have God for their sun are like planets. The old fable is true of these 'sons of the morning'—they make music as they roll and they flash back His light.

And then do not let us forget that this yielding of one's self to Him, swayed by His love, and this surrendering of will and purpose and affection and all that makes up our complex being, lead directly to the true possession of Him and the true possession of ourselves.

I have said that the only way by which spirit possesses spirit is by love, and that it must needs be on both sides. So we get God for ourselves when we give ourselves to God. There is a wonderful alternation of giving and receiving between the loving God and his beloved lovers; first the impartation of the divine to the human, then the surrender of the human to the divine, and then the larger gift of God to man, just as in some series of mirrors the light is flashed back from the one to the other, in bewildering manifoldness and shimmering of rays from either polished surface. God is ours when we are God's. 'And this is the covenant that I will make with them after these days, saith the Lord. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.'

And, in like manner, we never own ourselves until we have given ourselves to God. Each of us is like some feudatory prince, dependent upon an overlord. His subjects in his little territory rebel, and he has no power to subdue the insurgents, but he can send a message to the capital, and get the army of the king, who is his sovereign and theirs, to come down and bring them back to order, and establish his tottering throne. So if you desire to own yourself or to know the sweetness that you may get out of your own nature and the exercise of your powers, if you desire to be able to govern the realm within, put yourself into God's hands and say, 'I am Thine; hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.'

I need not say more than just a word about the other side of Paul's confession of faith, 'Whom I serve.' He employs the word which means the service of a worshipper, or even of a priest, and not that which means the service of a slave. His purpose was to represent how, as his whole inward nature bowed in submission to, and was under the influence of, God to whom he belonged, so his whole outward life was a life of devotion. He was serving Him there in the ship, amidst the storm and the squalor and the terror. His calmness was service; his confidence was service; the cheery words that he was speaking to these people were service. And on his whole life he believed that this was stamped, that he was devoted to God. So *there* is the true idea of a Christian life, that in all its aspects, attitudes, and acts it is to be a manifestation, in visible form, of inward devotion to, and ownership by, God. All our work may be worship, and we may 'pray without ceasing,' though no supplications come from our lips, if our hearts are in touch with Him and through our daily life we serve and honour Him. God's priests never are far away from their altar, and never are without, somewhat to offer, as long as they have the activities of daily duty and the difficulties of daily conflict to bring to Him and spread before Him.

II. So let me turn for a moment to some of the other aspects of these words to which I have already referred. I find in them, next, the bold confession which true religion requires.

Shipboard is a place where people find out one another very quickly. Character cannot well be hid there. And such circumstances as Paul had been in for the last fortnight, tossing up and down in *Adria*, with Death looking over the bulwarks of the crazy ship every moment, were certain to have brought out the inmost secrets of character. Paul durst not have said to these people 'the God whose I am and whom I serve' if he had not known that he had been living day by day a consistent and godly life amongst them.

And so, I note, first of all, that this confession of individual and personal relationship to God is incumbent on every Christian. We do not need to be always brandishing it before people's faces There is very little fear of the average Christian of this day blundering on that side. But we need, still less, to be always hiding it away. One hears a great deal from certain quarters about a religion that does not need to be vocal but shows what it is, without the necessity for words. Blessed be God! there *is* such a religion, but you will generally find that the people who have most of it are the people who are least tongue-tied when opportunity arises; and that if they have been witnessing for God in their quiet discharge of duty, with their hands instead of their lips, they are quite as ready to witness with their lips when it is fitting that they should do so. And surely, surely, if a man belongs to God, and if his whole life is to be the manifestation of the ownership that he recognises, that which specially reveals him—viz., his own articulate speech—cannot be left out of his methods of manifestation.

I am afraid that there are a great many professing Christian people nowadays who never, all their lives, have said to any one, 'The God whose I am and whom I serve.' And I beseech you, dear brethren, suffer this word of exhortation. To say so is a far more effectual, or at least more powerful, means of appeal than any direct invitation to share in the blessings. You may easily offend a man by saying to him, 'Won't you be a Christian too?' But it is hard to offend if you simply say that *you are* a Christian. The statement of personal experience is more powerful by far than all argumentation or eloquence or pleading appeals. We do more when we say, 'That which we have tasted and felt and handled of the Word of Life, declare we unto you,' than by any other means.

Only remember that the avowal must be backed up by a life, as Paul's was backed up on board that vessel. For unless it is so, the profession does far more harm than good. There are always keen critics round us, especially if we say that we are Christians. There were keen critics on board that ship. Do you think that these Roman soldiers, and the other prisoners, would not have smiled contemptuously at Paul, if this had been the first time that they had any reason to suppose that he was at all different from them? They would have said, 'The God whose *you* are and whom *you* serve? Why, you are just the same sort of man as if you worshipped Jupiter like the rest of us!' And that is what the world has a right to say to Christian people. The clearer our profession, the holier must be our lives.

III. Last of all, I find in these words the calmness and security which true religion secures.

The story, as I have already glanced at it in my introductory remarks, brings out very wonderfully and very beautifully Paul's promptitude, his calmness in danger, his absolute certainty of safety, and his unselfish thoughtfulness about his companions in peril. And all these things were the direct results of his entire surrender to God, and of the consistency of his daily life. It needed the angel in the vision to assure him that his life would be spared. But whether the angel had ever come or not, and though death had been close at his hand, the serenity and the peaceful assurance of safety which come out so beautifully in the story would have been there all the same. The man who can say 'I belong to God' does not need to trouble himself about dangers. He will have to exercise his common sense, as the Apostle shows us; he will have to use all the means that are in his power for the accomplishment of ends that he knows to be right and legitimate. But having done all that, he can say, 'I belong to Him,' it is His business to look after His own property. He is not going to hold His possessions with such a slack hand as that they shall slip between His fingers, and be lost in the mire. 'Thou wilt not lose the souls that are Thine in the grave, neither wilt Thou suffer the man whom Thou lovest to see corruption.' God keeps His treasures, and the surer we are that He is able to keep them unto that day, the calmer we may be in all our trouble.

And the safety that followed was also the direct result of the relationship of mutual possession and love established between God and the Apostle. We do not know to which of the two groups of the shipwrecked Paul belonged; whether he could swim or whether he had to hold on to some bit of floating wreckage or other, and so got 'safe to land.' But whichever way it was, it was neither his swimming nor the spar to which, perhaps, he clung, that landed him safe on shore. It was the God to whom he belonged. Faith is the true lifebelt that keeps us from being drowned in any stormy sea. And if you and I feel that we are His, and live accordingly, we shall be calm amid all change, serene when others are troubled, ready to be helpers of others even when we ourselves are in distress. And when the crash comes, and the ship goes to pieces: 'so it will come to pass that, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship, they all come safe to land,' and when the Owner counts His subjects and possessions on the quiet shore, as the morning breaks, there will not be one who has been lost in the surges, or whose name will be unanswered to when the muster-roll of the crew is called.

A TOTAL WRECK, ALL HANDS SAVED

'And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, 31. Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. 32. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. 33. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 34. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat; for this is for your health; for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. 35. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all; and when he had broken it, he began to eat. 36. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. 37. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. 38. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. 39. And when it was day, they knew not the land; but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. 40. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder-bands, and hoised up the main-sail to the wind, and made toward shore. 41. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground: and the fore part stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. 42. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. 43. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose: and commanded that they which could

swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land; 44. And the rest some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.'—ACTS xxvii. 30-44.

THE Jews were not seafaring people. Their coast had no safe harbours, and they seldom ventured on the Mediterranean. To find Paul in a ship with its bow pointed westwards is significant. It tells of the expansion of Judaism into a world-wide religion, and of the future course of Christianity. The only Old Testament parallel is Jonah, and the dissimilarities of the two incidents are as instructive as are their resemblances.

This minute narrative is evidently the work of one of the passengers who knew a good deal about nautical matters. It reads like a log-book. But as James Smith has well noted in his interesting monograph on the chapter, the writer's descriptions, though accurate, are unprofessional, thus confirming Luke's authorship. Where had the 'beloved physician' learned so much about the sea and ships? Did the great galleys carry surgeons as now? At all events the story is one of the most graphic accounts ever written This narrative begins when the doomed ship has cast anchor, with a rocky coast close under her lee. The one question is, Will the four anchors hold? No wonder that the passengers longed for daylight!

The first point is the crew's dastardly trick to save themselves, frustrated by Paul's insight and promptitude. The pretext for getting into the boat was specious. Anchoring by the bow as well as by the stern would help to keep the ship from driving ashore; and if once the crew were in the boat and pulled as far as was necessary to lay out the anchors. it would be easy, under cover of the darkness, to make good their escape on shore and leave the landsmen on board to shift for themselves. The boat must have been of considerable size to hold the crew of so large a ship. It was already lying alongside, and landsmen would not suspect what lay under the apparently brave attempt to add to the vessel's security, but Paul did so. His practical sagacity was as conspicuous a trait as his lofty enthusiasm. Common sense need not be divorced from high aims or from the intensest religious self-devotion. The idealist beat the practical centurion in penetrating the sailors' scheme.

That must have been a great nature which combined such different characteristics as the Apostle shows. Unselfish devotion is often wonderfully clear-sighted as to the workings of its opposite. The Apostle's promptitude is as noticeable as his penetration. He wastes no time in remonstrance with the cowards, who would have been over the side and off in the dark while he talked, but goes straight to the man in authority. Note, too, that he keeps his place as a prisoner. It is not his business to suggest what is to be done. That might have been resented as presumptuous; but he has a right to point out the danger, and he leaves the centurion to settle how to meet it. Significantly does he say 'ye,' not 'we.' He was perfectly certain that he 'must be brought before Cæsar'; and though he believed that all on board would escape, he seems to regard his own safety as even more certain than that of the others.

The lesson often drawn from his words is rightly drawn. They imply the necessity of men's action in order to carry out God's purpose. The whole shipful are to be saved, but 'except these abide . . . ye cannot be saved.' The belief that God wills anything is a reason for using all means to effect it, not for folding our hands and saying, 'God will do it, whether we do anything or not.' The line between fatalism and Christian reliance on God's will is clearly drawn in Paul's words.

Note too the prompt, decisive action of the soldiers. They waste no words, nor do they try to secure the sailors, but out with their knives and cut the tow-rope, and away into the darkness drifts the boat. It might have been better to have kept it, as affording a chance of safety for all; but probably it was wisest to get rid of it at once. Many times in every life it is necessary to sacrifice possible advantages in order to secure a more necessary good. The boat has to be let go if the passengers in the ship are to be saved. Misused good things have sometimes to be given up in order to keep people from temptation.

The next point brings Paul again to the front. In the night he had been the saviour of the whole shipload of people. Now as the twilight is beginning, and the time for decisive action will soon be here with the day, he becomes their encourager and counsellor. Again his saving common sense is shown. He knew that the moment for intense struggle was at hand, and so he prepares them for it by getting them to eat a substantial breakfast. It was because of his faith that he did so. His religion did not lead him to do as some people would have done—begin to talk to the soldiers about their souls—but he looked after their bodies. Hungry, wet, sleepless, they were in no condition to scramble through the surf, and the first thing to be done was to get some food into them. Of course he does not mean that they had eaten absolutely nothing for a fortnight, but only that they had had scanty nourishment. But Paul's religion went harmoniously with his care for men's bodies. He 'gave thanks to God in presence of them all'; and who shall say that that prayer did not touch hearts more deeply than religious talk would have done? Paul's calmness would be contagious; and the root of it, in his belief in what his God had told him, would be impressively manifested to all on board. Moods are infectious; so 'they were all of good cheer,' and no doubt things looked less black after a hearty meal.

A little point may be noticed here, namely, the naturalness of the insertion of the numbers on board at this precise place in the narrative. There would probably be a muster of all hands for the meal, and in view of the approaching scramble, in order that, if they got to shore, there might be certainty as to whether any were lost. So here the numbers come in. They were still not without hope of saving the ship, though Paul had told them it would be lost; and so they jettison the cargo of wheat from Alexandria. By this time it is broad day and something must be done.

The next point is the attempt to beach the vessel. 'They knew not the land,' that is, the part of the coast where they had been driven; but they saw that, while for the most part it was iron-bound, there was a shelving sandy bay at one point on to which it might be possible to run her ashore. The Revised Version gives a much more accurate and seamanlike account than the Authorised Version does. The anchors were not taken on board, but to save time and trouble were 'left in the sea,' the cables being simply cut. The 'rudder-bands'—that is, the lashings which had secured the two paddle-like rudders. one on either beam, which had been tied up to be out of the way when the stern anchors were put out—are loosed, and the rudders drop into place. The foresail (not 'mainsail,' as the Authorised Version has it) is set to help to drive the ship ashore. It is all exactly what we should expect to be done.

But an unexpected difficulty met the attempt, which is explained by the lie of the coast at St. Paul's Bay, Malta, as James Smith fully describes in his book. A little island, separated from the mainland by a channel of not more than one hundred yards in breadth, lies off the north-east point of the bay, and to a beholder at the entrance to the bay looks as if continuous with it. When the ship got farther in, they would see the narrow channel, through which a strong current sets and makes a considerable disturbance as it meets the run of the water in the bay. A bank of mud has been formed at the point of meeting. Thus not only the water shoals, but the force of the current through the narrows would hinder the ship from getting past it to the beach. The two things together made her ground, 'stem on' to the bank; and then, of course, the heavy sea running into the bay, instead of helping her to the shore, began to break up the stern which was turned towards it.

Common peril makes beasts of prey and their usual victims crouch together. Benefits received touch generous hearts. But the legionaries on board had no such sentiments. Paul's helpfulness was forgotten. A still more ignoble exhibition of the instinct of self-preservation than the sailors had shown dictated that cowardly, cruel suggestion to kill the prisoners. Brutal indifference to human life, and Rome's iron discipline holding terror over the legionaries' head-are vividly illustrated in the 'counsel.' So were Paul's kindnesses requited! It is hard to melt rude natures even by kindness; and if Paul had been looking for gratitude he would have been disappointed, as we so often are. But if we do good to men because we expect requital, even in thankfulness, we are not pure in motive. 'Looking for nothing again' is the spirit enforced by God's pattern and by experience.

The centurion had throughout, like most of his fellows in Scripture, been kindly disposed, and showed more regard for Paul than the rank and file did. He displays the good side of militarism, while they show its bad side; for he is collected, keeps his head in extremities, knows his own mind, holds the reins in a firm hand, even in that supreme moment, has a quick eye to see what must be done, and decision to order it at once. It was prudent to send first those who could swim; they could then help the others. The distance was short, and as the bow was aground, there would be some shelter under the lee of the vessel, and shoal water, where they could wade, would be reached in a few minutes or moments.

'And so it came to pass, that they all escaped safe to the land.' So Paul had assured them they would. God needs no miracles in order to sway human affairs. Everything here was perfectly 'natural,' and yet His hand wrought through all, and the issue was His fulfilment of His promises. If we rightly look at common things, we shall see God working in them all, and believe that He can deliver us as truly without miracles as ever He did any by miracles. Promptitude, prudence, skill, and struggle with the waves, saved the whole two hundred and seventy-six souls in that battered ship; yet it was God who saved them all.

Whether Paul was among the party that could swim, or among the more helpless who had to cling to anything that would float, he was held up by God's hand, and it was He who 'sent from above, took him, and drew him out of many waters.'

AFTER THE WRECK

'And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. 2. And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. 3. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. 5. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. 6. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. 7. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. 8. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever, and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. 9. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: 10. Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary. 11. And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. 12. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. 13. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli; 14. Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. 15. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. 16. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.'—ACTS xxviii. 1-16.

'THEY *all* escaped safe to land,' says Luke with emphasis, pointing to the verification of Paul's assurance that there should be no loss of life. That two hundred and seventy-six men on a wreck should all be saved was very improbable, but the angel had promised, and Paul had believed that it should be 'even so as it had been spoken unto him.' Therefore the improbable came to pass, and every man of the ship's company stood safe on the shore. Faith which grasps God's promise 'laughs at impossibilities' and brings them into the region of facts.

Wet, cold, weary, and anxious, the rescued men huddled together on the shore in the early morning, and no doubt they were doubtful what reception they would have from the islanders who had been attracted to the beach. Their first question was, 'Where are we?' so completely had they lost their reckoning. Some of the inhabitants could speak Greek or Latin, and could tell them that they were on Melita, but the most part of the crowd that came round them could only speak in a tongue strange to Luke, and are therefore called by him 'barbarians,' not as being uncivilised, but as not speaking Greek. But they could speak the eloquent language of kindness and pity. They were heathens, but they were men. They had not come down to the wreck for plunder, as might have been feared, but to help the unfortunates who were shivering on the beach in the downpour of rain, and chilled to the bone by exposure.

As always, Paul fills Luke's canvas; the other two hundred and seventy-five were ciphers. Two incidents, in which the Apostle appears as protected by God from danger, and as a fountain of healing for others, are all that is told of the three months' stay in Malta. Taken together, these cover the whole ground of the Christian's place in the world; he is an object of divine care, he is a medium of divine blessing. In the former one, we see in Paul's activity in gathering his bundle of brushwood an example of how he took the humblest duties on himself, and was not hindered either by the false sense of dignity which keeps smaller men from doing small things, as Chinese gentlemen pride themselves on long nails as a token that they do no work, or by the helplessness in practical matters which is sometimes natural to, and often affected by, men of genius, from taking his share in common duties.

The shipwreck took place in November probably, and the 'viper' had curled itself up for its winter sleep, and had been lifted with the twigs by Paul's hasty hand. Roused by the warmth, it darted at Paul's hand before it could be withdrawn, and fixed its fangs. The sight of it dangling there excited suspicions in the mind of the natives, who would know that Paul was a prisoner, and so jumped to the conclusion that he was a murderer pursued by the Goddess of Justice. These rude islanders had consciences, which bore witness to a divine law of retribution.

However mistaken may be heathens' conceptions of what constitutes right and wrong, they all know that it is wrong to do wrong, and the dim anticipation of God-inflicted punishment is in their hearts. The swift change of opinion about Paul is like, though it is the reverse of, what the people of Lystra thought of him. *They* first took him for a god, and then for a criminal, worshipping him to-day and stoning him to-morrow. This teaches us how unworthy the heathen conception of a deity is, and how lightly the name was given. It may teach us too how fickle and easily led popular judgments are, and how they are ever prone to rush from one extreme to another, so that the people's idol of one week is their abhorrence the next, and the applause and execration are equally undeserved. These Maltese critics did what many of us are doing with less excuse—arguing as to men's merits from their calamities or successes. A good man may be stung by a serpent in the act of doing a good thing; that does not prove him to be a monster. He may be unhurt by what seems fatal; that does not prove him to be a god or a saint.

The other incident recorded as occurring in Malta brings out the Christian's relation to others as a source of healing. An interesting incidental proof of Luke's accuracy is found in the fact that inscriptions discovered in Malta show that the official title of the governor was 'First of the Melitæans.' The word here rendered 'chief' is literally 'first.' Luke's precision is shown in another direction in his diagnosis of the diseases of Publius's father, which are described by technical medical terms. The healing seems to have been unasked. Paul 'went in,' as if from a spontaneous wish to render help. There is no record of any expectation or request from Publius.

Christians are to be 'like the dew on the grass, which waiteth not for man,' but falls unsought. The manner of the healing brings out very clearly its divine source, and Paul's part as being simply that of the channel for God's power. He prays, and then lays his hands on the sick man. There are no words assuring him of healing. God is invoked, and then His power flows through the hands of the suppliant. So with all our work for men in bringing the better cure with which we are entrusted, we are but channels of the blessing, pipes through which the water of life is brought to thirsty lips. Therefore prayer must precede and accompany all Christian efforts to communicate the healing of the Gospel; and the most gifted are but, like Paul, 'ministers through whom' faith and salvation come.

The argument from silence is precarious, but the entire omission of notice of evangelistic work in Melita is noteworthy. Probably the Apostle as a prisoner was not free to preach Christ in any public manner.

Ancient navigation was conducted in a leisurely fashion very strange to us. Three months' delay in the island, rendered necessary by wintry storms, would end about the early part of March, when the season for safe sailing began. So the third ship which was used in this voyage set sail. Luke notices its 'sign' as being that of the Twin Brethren, the patrons of sailors, whose images were, no doubt, displayed on the bow, just as to-day boats in that region often have a Madonna nailed on the mast. Strange conjunction—Castor and Pollux on the prow, and Paul on the deck!

Puteoli, on the bay of Naples, was the landing-place, and there, after long confinement with uncongenial companions, the three Christians, Paul, Aristarchus, and Luke, found brethren. We can understand the joy of such a meeting, and can almost hear the narrative of perils which would be poured into sympathetic ears. Observe that, according to what seems the true reading, verse 14 says, 'We were consoled among them, remaining seven days.' The centurion could scarcely delay his march to please the Christians at Puteoli; and the thought that the Apostle, whose spirit had never flagged while danger was near and effort was needed, felt some tendency to collapse, and required cheering when the strain was off, is as natural as it is pathetic.

So the whole company set off on their march to Rome—about a hundred and forty miles. The week's delay in Puteoli would give time for apprising the church in Rome of the Apostle's coming, and two parties came out to meet him, one travelling as far as Appii Forum, about forty Roman miles from the city; the other as far as 'The Three Taverns,' some ten miles nearer it. The simple notice of the meeting is more touching than many words would have been. It brings out again the Apostle's somewhat depressed state, partly due, no doubt, to nervous tension during the long and hazardous voyage, and partly to his consciousness that the decisive moment was very near. But when he grasped the hands and looked into the faces of the Roman brethren, whom he had so long hungered to see, and to whom he had poured out his heart in his letter, he 'thanked God, and took courage.' The most heroic need, and are helped by, the sympathy of the humble. Luther was braced for the Diet of Worms by the knight who clapped him on the back as he passed in and spoke a hearty word of cheer.

There would be some old friends in the delegation of Roman Christians, perhaps some of those who are named in Romans xvi., such as Priscilla and Aquila, and the unnamed matron, Rufus's mother, whom Paul there calls 'his mother and mine.' It would be an hour of love and effusion, and the shadow of appearing before Cæsar would not sensibly dim the brightness. Paul saw God's hand in that glad meeting, as we should do in all the sweetness of congenial intercourse. It was not only because the welcomers were his friends that he was glad, but because they were Christ's friends and servants. The Apostle saw in them the evidence that the kingdom was advancing even in the world's capital, and under the shadow of Cæsar's throne, and that gladdened him and made him forget personal anxieties. We too should be willing to sink our own interests in the joy of seeing the spread of Christ's kingdom.

Paul turned thankfulness for the past and the present into calm hope for the future: 'He took courage.' There was much to discourage and to excuse tremors and forebodings, but he had God and Christ with him, and therefore he could front the uncertain future without flinching, and leave all its possibilities in God's hands. Those who have such a past as every Christian has should put fear far from them, and go forth to meet any future with quiet hearts, and minds kept in perfect peace because they are stayed on God.

THE LAST GLIMPSE OF PAUL

'And it came to pass, that, after three days, Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans; 18. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. 19. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. 20. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. 21. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judæa concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee. 22. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against. 23. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. 24. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. 25. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esias the prophet unto our fathers, 26. Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: 27. For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 28. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. 29. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. 30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.'—ACTS xxviii. 17-31.

We have here our last certain glimpse of Paul. His ambition had long been to preach in Rome, but he little knew how his desire was to be fulfilled. We too are often surprised at the shape which God's answers to our wishes take. Well for us if we take the unexpected or painful events which accomplish some long-cherished purpose as cheerfully and boldly as did Paul. We see him in this last glimpse as the centre of three concentric widening circles.

I. We have Paul and the leaders of the Roman synagogue. He was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet. After such a voyage a pause would have been natural for a less eager worker; but three days were all that he allowed himself, and these would, no doubt, be largely occupied by intercourse with the Roman Christians, and with the multitude of little things to be looked after on entering on his new lodging. Paul had gifts that we have not, he exemplified many heroic virtues which we are not called on to repeat; but he had eminently the prosaic virtue of diligence and persistence in work, and the humblest life affords a sphere in which that indispensable though homely excellence of his can be imitated. What a long holiday some of us would think we had earned, if we had come through what Paul had encountered since he left Cæsarea!

The summoning of the 'chief of the Jews' to him was a prudent preparation for his trial rather than an evangelistic effort. It was important to ascertain their feelings, and if possible to secure their neutrality in regard to the approaching investigation. Hence the Apostle seeks to put his case to them so as to show his true adherence to the central principles of Judaism, insisting that he is guiltless of revolt against either the nation or the law and traditional observances; that he had been found innocent by the Palestinian representatives of Roman authority; that his appeal to Cæsar, which would naturally seem hostile to the rulers in Jerusalem, was not meant as an accusation of the nation to which he felt himself to belong, and so was no sign of deficient patriotism, but had been forced on him as his only means of saving his life.

It was a difficult course which he had to steer, and he picked his way between the shoals with marvellous address. But his explanation of his position is not only a skilful piece of *apologia*, but it embodies one of his strongest convictions, which it is worth our while to grasp firmly; namely, that Christianity is the true fulfilment and perfecting of the old revelation. His declaration that, so far from his being a deserter from Israel, he was a prisoner just because he was true to the Messianic hope which was Israel's highest glory, was not a clever piece of special pleading meant for the convincing of the Roman Jews, but was a principle which runs through all his teaching. Christians were the true Jews. He was not a recreant in confessing, but they were deserters in denying, the fulfilment in Jesus of the hope which had shone before the generation of 'the fathers.' The chain which bound him to the legionary who 'kept him,' and which he held forth as he spoke, was the witness that he was still 'an Hebrew of the Hebrews.'

The heads of the Roman synagogue went on the tack of non-committal, as was quite natural. They were much too astute to accept at once an *ex parte* statement, and so took refuge in professing ignorance. Probably they knew a good deal more than they owned. Their statement has been called 'unhistorical,' and, oddly enough, has been used to discredit Luke's narrative. It is a remarkable canon of criticism that a reporter is responsible for the truthfulness of assertions which he reports, and that, if he has occasion to report truthfully an untruth, he is convicted of the untruth which he truthfully reports. Luke is responsible for telling what these people found it convenient to say; they are responsible for its veracity. But they did not say quite as much as is sometimes supposed. As the Revised Version shows, they simply said that they had not had any official deputation or report about Paul, which is perfectly probable, as it was extremely unlikely that any ship leaving after Paul's could have reached Italy. They may have known a great deal about him, but they had no information to act upon about his trial. Their reply is plainly shaped so as to avoid expressing any definite opinion or pledging themselves to any course of action till they do hear from 'home.'

They are politely cautious, but they cannot help letting out some of their bile in their reference to 'this sect.' Paul had said nothing about it, and their allusion betrays a fuller knowledge of him and it than it suited their plea for delay to own. Their wish to hear what he thought sounded very innocent and impartial, but was scarcely the voice of candid seekers after truth. They must have known of the existence of the Roman Church, which included many Jews, and they could scarcely be ignorant of the beliefs on which it was founded; but they probably thought that they would hear enough from Paul in the proposed conference to enable them to carry the synagogue with them in doing all they could to procure his condemnation. He had hoped to secure at least their neutrality; they seem to have been preparing to join his enemies. The request for full exposition of a prisoner's belief has often been but a trap to ensure his martyrdom. But we have to 'be ready to give to every man a reason for the hope that is in us,' even when the motive for asking it may be anything but the sincere desire to learn.

II. Therefore Paul was willing to lay his heart's belief open, whatever doing so might bring. So the second circle forms round him, and we have him preaching the Gospel to 'many' of the Jews. He could not go to the synagogue, so much of the synagogue came to him. The usual method was pursued by Paul in arguing from the old revelation, but we may note the twofold manner of his preaching, 'testifying' and 'persuading,' the former addressed more to the understanding, and the latter to the affections and will, and may learn how Christian teachers should seek to blend both—to work their arguments, not in frost, but in fire, and not to bully or scold or frighten men into the Kingdom, but to draw them with cords of love. Persuasion without a basis of solid reasoning is puerile and impotent; reasoning without the warmth of persuasion is icy cold, and therefore nothing grows from it.

Note too the protracted labour 'from morning till evening.' One can almost see the eager disputants spending the livelong day over the rolls of the prophets, relays of Rabbis, perhaps, relieving one another in the assault on the one opponent's position, and he holding his ground through all the hours—a pattern for us teachers of all degrees.

The usual effects followed. The multitude was sifted by the Gospel, as its hearers always are, some accepting and some rejecting. These double effects ever follow it, and to one or other of these two classes we each belong. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay; the same light is joy to sound eyes and agony to diseased ones; the same word is a savour of life unto life and a savour of death unto death; the same Christ is set for the fall and for the rising of men, and is to some the sure foundation on which they build secure, and to some the stone on which, stumbling, they are broken, and which, falling on them, grinds them to powder.

Paul's solemn farewell takes up Isaiah's words, already used by Jesus. It is his last recorded utterance to his brethren after the flesh, weighty, and full of repressed yearning and sorrow. It is heavy with prophecy, and marks an epoch in the sad, strange history of that strange nation. Israel passes out of sight with that dread sentence fastened to its breast, like criminals of old, on whose front was fixed the record of their crimes and their condemnation. So this tragic self-exclusion from hope and life is the end of all that wondrous history of ages of divine revelation and patience, and of man's rebellion. The Gospel passes to the Gentiles, and the Jew shuts himself out. So it has been for nineteen centuries. Was not that scene in Paul's lodging in Rome the end of an epoch and the prediction of a sad future?

III. Not less significant and epoch-making is the glimpse of Paul which closes the Acts. We have the third concentric circle—Paul and the multitudes who came to his house and heard the Gospel. We note two points here. First, that his unhindered preaching in the very heart of the world's capital for two whole years is, in one aspect, the completion of the book. As Bengel tersely says, 'The victory of the word of God, Paul at Rome. The apex of the Gospel, the end of Acts.'

But, second, as clearly, the ending is abrupt, and is not a satisfying close. The lengthened account of the whole process of Paul's imprisonments and hearings before the various Roman authorities is most unintelligible if Luke intended to break off at the very crucial point, and say nothing about the event to which he had been leading up for so many chapters. There is much probability in Ramsay's suggestion that Luke intended to write a third book, containing the account of the trial and subsequent events, but was prevented by causes unknown, perhaps by martyrdom. Be that as it may, these two verses, with some information pieced out of the Epistles written during the imprisonment, are all that we know of Paul's life in Rome. From Philippians we learn that the Gospel spread by reason of the earlier stages of his trial. From the other Epistles we can collect some particulars of his companions, and of the oversight which he kept up of the Churches.

The picture here drawn lays hold, not on anything connected with his trial, but on his evangelistic activity, and shows us how, notwithstanding all hindrances, anxieties about his fate, weariness, and past toils, the flame of evangelistic fervour burned undimmed in 'Paul the aged,' as the flame of mistaken zeal had burned in the 'young man named Saul,' and how the work which had filled so many years of wandering and homelessness was carried on with all the old joyfulness, confidence, and success, from the prisoner's lodging. In such unexpected fashion did God fulfil the Apostle's desire to 'preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also.' To preach the word with all boldness is the duty of us Christians who have entered into the heritage of fuller freedom than Paul's, and of whom it is truer than of him that we can do it, 'no man forbidding' us.

PAUL IN ROME

And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.'—ACTS xxviii. 30, 31.

So ends this book. It stops rather than ends. Many reasons might be suggested for closing here. Probably the simplest is the best, that nothing more is said for nothing more had yet been done. Probably the book was written during these two years. This abrupt close suggests several noteworthy thoughts.

I. The true theme of the book.

How convenient if Luke had told us a little more! But Paul's history is unfinished, like Peter's and John's. This book's treatment of all the Apostles teaches, as we have often had to remark, that Christ and His acts are its true subject.

We are wise if we learn the lesson of keeping all human teachers, even a Paul, in their inferior place, and if we say of each of them: 'He was not the Light, but came that he might bear witness of the Light.'

II. God's unexpected and unwelcome ways of fulfilling our desires, and His purposes.

It had long been Paul's dream to 'see Rome.' How little he knew the steps by which his dream was to be fulfilled! He told the Ephesian elders that he was going up to Jerusalem under compulsion of the Spirit, and 'not knowing the things that should befall him there,' except that he was certain of 'bonds and imprisonment.' He did not know that these were

God's way of bringing him to Rome. Jewish fury, Roman statecraft and law-abidingness, two years of a prison, a stormy voyage, a shipwreck, led him to his long-wished-for goal. God uses even man's malice and opposition to the Gospel to advance the progress of the Gospel. Men, like coral insects, build their little bit, all unaware of the whole of which it is a part, but the reef rises above the waves and ocean breaks against it in vain.

So we may gather lessons of submission, of patient acceptance of apparently adverse circumstances. and of quiet faith that He who 'makes stormy winds to fulfil His word and flaming fires His ministers,' will bend to the carrying out of His designs all things, be they seemingly friendly or hostile, and will realise our dreams, if in accordance with His will, even through events which seem to shatter them. Let us trust and be patient till we see the issues of events.

III. The world's mistaken estimate of greatness.

Who was the greatest man in Rome at that hour? Not the Cæsar but the poor Jewish prisoner. How astonished both would have been if they had been told the truth! The two kingdoms were, so to speak, set face to face in these two, their representatives, and neither of them knew his own relative importance. The Cæsar was all unaware that, for all his legions and his power, he was but 'a noise'; Paul was as unconscious that he was incomparably the most powerful of the influences that were then at work in the world. The haughty and stolid eyes of Romans saw in him nothing but a prisoner, sent up from a turbulent subject land on some obscure charge, a mere nobody. The crowds in forum and amphitheatre would have laughed at any one who had pointed to that humble 'hired house,' and said, 'There lodges a man who bears a word that will shatter and remould the city, the Empire, the world.'

Let us have confidence in the greatness of the word, though the world may be deaf to its music and blind to its power, and let us never fear to ally ourselves with a cause which we know to be God's, however it may be unpopular and made light of by the 'leaders of opinion.'

IV. The true relation between the Church and the State.

'None forbidding him' marks a great step forward. Paul's unhindered freedom of speech in Rome itself marks 'the victory of the word, the apex of the Gospel.' The neutral attitude of the imperial power was, indeed, broken by subsequent persecutions, but we may say that on the whole Rome let Christianity alone. That is the best service that the State can render to the Church. Anything more is help which encumbers and is harmful to the true spiritual power of the Gospel. The real requirement which it makes on the civil power is simply what the Greek philosopher asked of the king who was proffering his good offices, 'Stand out of the sunshine!'

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

ROMANS

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THE WITNESS OF THE RESURRECTION

'Declared to be the Son of God with power, . . . by the resurrection of the dead.'—ROMANS i. 4 (R.V.).

IT is a great mistake to treat Paul's writings, and especially this Epistle, as mere theology. They are the transcript of his life's experience. As has been well said, the gospel of Paul is an interpretation of the significance of the life and work of Jesus based upon the revelation to him of Jesus as the risen Christ. He believed that he had seen Jesus on the road to Damascus, and it was that appearance which revolutionised his life, turned him from a persecutor into a disciple, and united him with the Apostles as ordained to be a witness with them of the Resurrection. To them all the Resurrection of Jesus was first of all a historical fact appreciated chiefly in its bearing on Him. By degrees they discerned that so transcendent a fact bore in itself a revelation of what would become the experience of all His followers beyond the grave, and a symbol of the present life possible for them. All three of these aspects are plainly declared in Paul's writings. In our text it is chiefly the first which is made prominent. All that distinguishes Christianity, and makes it worth believing, or mighty, is inseparably connected with the Resurrection.

I. The Resurrection of Christ declares His Sonship.

Resurrection and Ascension are inseparably connected. Jesus does not rise to share again in the ills and weariness of humanity. Risen, 'He dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him.' 'He died unto sin once'; and His risen humanity had nothing in it on which physical death could lay hold. That He should from some secluded dimple on Olivet ascend before the gazing disciples until the bright cloud, which was the symbol of the Divine Presence, received Him out of their sight, was but the end of the process which began unseen in morning twilight. He laid aside the garments of the grave and passed out of the sepulchre which was made sure by the great stone rolled against its mouth. The grand avowal of faith in His Resurrection loses meaning, unless it is completed as Paul completed his 'yea rather that was raised from the dead,' with the triumphant 'who is at the right hand of God.' Both are supernatural, and the Virgin Birth corresponds at the beginning to the supernatural Resurrection and Ascension at the close. Both such an entrance into the world and such a departure from it, proclaim at once His true humanity, and that 'this is the Son of God.'

Still further, the Resurrection is God's solemn 'Amen' to the tremendous claims which Christ had made. The fact of His Resurrection, indeed, would not declare His divinity; but the Resurrection of One who had spoken such words does. If the Cross and a nameless grave had been the end, what a *reductio ad absurdum* that would have been to the claims of Jesus to have ever been with the Father and to be doing always the things that pleased Him. The Resurrection is God's last and loudest proclamation, 'This is My beloved Son: hear ye Him.' The Psalmist of old had learned to trust that his sonship and consecration to the Father made it impossible that that Father should leave his soul in

Sheol, or suffer one who was knit to Him by such sacred bonds to see corruption; and the unique Sonship and perfect self-consecration of Jesus went down into the grave in the assured confidence, as He Himself declared, that the third day He would rise again. The old alternative seems to retain all its sharp points: Either Christ rose again from the dead, or His claims are a series of blasphemous arrogances and His character irremediably stained.

But we may also remember that Scripture not only represents Christ's Resurrection as a divine act but also as the act of Christ's own power. In His earthly life He asserted that His relation both to physical death and to resurrection was an entirely unique one. 'I have power,' said He, 'to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again'; and yet, even in this tremendous instance of self-assertion, He remains the obedient Son, for He goes on to say, 'This commandment have I received of My Father.' If these claims are just, then it is vain to stumble at the miracles which Jesus did in His earthly life. If He could strip it off and resume it, then obviously it was not a life like other men's. The whole phenomenon is supernatural, and we shall not be in the true position to understand and appreciate it and Him until, like the doubting Thomas, we fall at the feet of the risen Son, and breathe out loyalty and worship in that rapturous exclamation, 'My Lord and my God.'

II. The Resurrection interprets Christ's Death.

There is no more striking contrast than that between the absolute non-receptivity of the disciples in regard to all Christ's plain teachings about His death and their clear perception after Pentecost of the mighty power that lay in it. The very fact that they continued disciples at all, and that there continued to be such a community as the Church, demands their belief in the Resurrection as the only cause which can account for it. If He did not rise from the dead, and if His followers did not know that He did so by the plainest teachings of common-sense, they ought to have scattered, and borne in isolated hearts the bitter memories of disappointed hopes; for if He lay in a nameless grave, and they were not sure that He was risen from the dead, His death would have been a conclusive showing up of the falsity of His claims. In it there would have been no atoning power, no triumph over sin. If the death of Christ were not followed by His Resurrection and Ascension, the whole fabric of Christianity falls to pieces. As the Apostle puts it in his great chapter on resurrection, 'Ye are yet in your sins.' The forgiveness which the Gospel holds forth to men does not depend on the mercy of God or on the mere penitence of man, but upon the offering of the one sacrifice for sins in His death, which is justified by His Resurrection as being accepted by God. If we cannot triumphantly proclaim 'Christ is risen indeed,' we have nothing worth preaching.

We are told now that the ethics of Christianity are its vital centre, which will stand out more plainly when purified from these mystical doctrines of a Death as the sin-offering for the world, and a Resurrection as the great token that that offering avails. Paul did not think so. To him the morality of the Gospel was all deduced from the life of Christ the Son of God as our Example, and from His death for us which touches men's hearts and makes obedience to Him our joyful answer to what He has done for us. Christianity is a new thing in the world, not as moral teaching, but as moral power to obey that teaching, and that depends on the Cross interpreted by the Resurrection. If we have only a dead Christ, we have not a living Christianity.

III. Resurrection points onwards to Christ's coming again.

Paul at Athens declared in the hearing of supercilious Greek philosophers, that the Jesus, whom he proclaimed to them, was 'the Man whom God had ordained to judge the world in righteousness,' and that 'He had given assurance thereof unto all men, in that He raised Him from the dead.' The Resurrection was the beginning of the process which, from the human point of view, culminated in the Ascension. Beyond the Ascension stretches the supernatural life of the glorified Son of God. Olivet cannot be the end, and the words of the two men in white apparel who stood amongst the little group of the upward gazing friends, remain as the hope of the Church: 'This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.' That great assurance implies a visible corporeal return locally defined, and having for its purpose to complete the work which Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, each advanced a stage. The Resurrection is the corner-stone of the whole Christian faith. It seals the truths that Jesus is the Son of God with power, that He died for us, that He has ascended on high to prepare a place for us, that He will come again and take us to Himself. If we, by faith in Him, take for ours the women's greeting on that Easter morning, 'The Lord hath risen indeed,' He will come to us with His own greeting, 'Peace be unto you.'

PRIVILEGE AND OBLIGATION

'To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.'—ROMANS i. 7.

THIS is the address of the Epistle. The first thing to be noticed about it, by way of introduction, is the universality of this designation of Christians. Paul had never been in Rome, and knew very little about the religious stature of the converts there. But he has no hesitation in declaring that they are all 'beloved of God' and 'saints.' There were plenty of imperfect Christians amongst them; many things to rebuke; much deadness, coldness, inconsistency, and yet none of these in the slightest degree interfered with the application of these great designations to them. So, then, 'beloved of God' and 'saints' are not distinctions of classes within the pale of Christianity, but belong to the whole community, and to each member of the body.

The next thing to note, I think, is how these two great terms, 'beloved of God' and 'saints,' cover almost the whole ground of the Christian life. They are connected with each other very closely, as I shall have occasion to show presently, but in the meantime it may be sufficient to mark how the one carries us deep into the heart of God and the other extends over the whole ground of our relation to Him. The one is a statement of a universal prerogative, the other an enforcement of a universal obligation. Let us look, then, at these two points, the universal privilege and the universal obligation of the Christian life.

I. The universal privilege of the Christian life.

'Beloved of God.' Now we are so familiar with the juxtaposition of the two ideas, 'love' and 'God,' that we cease to feel the wonderfulness of their union. But until Jesus Christ had done His work no man believed that the two thoughts could be brought together.

Does God love any one? We think the question too plain to need to be put, and the answer instinctive. But it is not by any means instinctive, and the fact is that until Christ answered it for us, the world stood dumb before the question that its own heart raised, and when tortured spirits asked, 'Is there care in heaven, and is there love?' there was 'no voice, nor answer, nor any that regarded.' Think of the facts of life; think of the facts of nature. Think of sorrows and miseries and pains, and sins, and wasted lives and storms, and tempests, and diseases, and convulsions; and let us feel how true the grim saying is, that

'Nature, red in tooth and claw,
With rapine, shrieks against the creed'

that God is love.

And think of what the world has worshipped, and of all the varieties of monstrosity, not the less monstrous because sometimes beautiful, before which men have bowed. Cruel, lustful, rapacious, capricious, selfish, indifferent deities they have adored. And then, 'God hath established,' proved, demonstrated 'His love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.'

Oh, brethren, do not let us kick down the ladder by which we have climbed; or, in the name of a loving God, put away the Christian teaching which has begotten the conception in humanity of a God that loves. There are men to-day who would never have come within sight of that sunlight truth, even as a glimmering star, away down upon the horizon, if it had not been for the Gospel; and who now turn round upon that very Gospel which has given them the conception, and accuse it of narrow and hard thoughts of the love of God.

One of the Scripture truths against which the assailant often turns his sharpest weapons is that which is involved in my text, the Scripture answer to the other question, 'Does not God love all?' Yes! yes! a thousand times, yes! But there is another question, Does the love of God, to all, make His special designation of Christian men as His beloved the least unlikely? Surely there is no kind of contradiction between the broadest proclamation of the universality of the love of God and Paul's decisive declaration that, in a very deep and real manner, they who are in Christ are the beloved of God. Surely special affection is not in its nature, inconsistent with universal beneficence and benevolence. Surely it is no exaltation, but rather a degradation of the conception of the divine love, if we proclaim its utter indifference to men's characters. Surely you are not honouring God when you say, 'It is all the same to Him whether a man loves Him and serves Him, or lifts himself up in rebellion against Him, and makes himself his own centre, and earth his aim and his all.' Surely to imagine a God who not only makes His sun to shine and His rains and dews to fall on the unthankful and the evil, that He may draw them to love Him, but who also is conceived as taking the sinful creature who yet cleaves to his sins to His heart, as He does the penitent soul that longs for His image to be produced in it, is to blaspheme, and not to honour the love. the universal love of God.

God forbid that any words that ever drop from my lips should seem to cast the smallest shadow of doubt on that great truth, 'God so loved the world that He gave His Son!' But God forbid, equally, that any words of mine should seem to favour the, to me, repellent idea that the infinite love of God disregards the character of the man on whom it falls. There are manifestations of that loving heart which any man can receive; and each man gets as much of the love of God as it is possible to pour upon him. But granite rock does not drink in the dew as a flower does; and the nature of the man on whom God's love falls determines how much, and what manner of its manifestations shall pass into his true possession, and what shall remain without.

So, on the whole, we have to answer the questions, 'Does God love any? Does not God love all? Does God specially love some?' with the one monosyllable, 'Yes.

And so, dear brethren, let us learn the path by which we can pass into that blessed community of those on whom the fullness and sweetness and tenderest tenderness of the Father's heart will fall. 'If a man love Me, he will keep My words; and My Father will love him.' Myths tell us that the light which, at the beginning, had been diffused through a nebulous mass, was next gathered into a sun. So the universal love of God is concentrated in Jesus Christ; and if we have Him we have it; and if we have faith we have Him, and can say, 'Neither life, nor death, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

II. Then, secondly, mark the universal obligation of the Christian life.

'Called to be saints,' says my text. Now you will observe that the two little words 'to be' are inserted here as a supplement. They may be correct enough, but they are open to the possibility of misunderstanding, as if the saintship, to which all Christian people are 'called,' was something future, and not realised at the moment. Now, in the context, the Apostle employs the same form of expression with regard to himself in a clause which illuminates the meaning of my text. 'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ,' says he, in the first verse, 'called to be an Apostle,' or, more correctly, 'a called Apostle.' The apostleship coincided in time with the call, was contemporaneous with that which was its cause. And if Paul was an Apostle since he was called, saints are saints since *they* are called. 'The beloved of God' are 'the called saints.'

I need only observe, further, that the word 'called' here does not mean 'named,' or 'designated,' but 'summoned.' It describes not the name by which Christian men are known, but the thing which they are invited, summoned, 'called' by God to be. It is their vocation, not their designation. Now, then, I need not, I suppose, remind you that 'saint' and 'holy' convey precisely the same idea: the one expressing it in a word of Teutonic, and the other in one of classic derivation.

We notice that the true idea of this universal holiness which, *ipso facto*, belongs to all Christian people, is consecration to God. In the old days temple, altars, sacrifices, sacrificial vessels, persons such as priests, periods like Sabbaths and feasts, were called 'holy.' The common idea running through all these uses of the word is *belonging to God*, and that is the root notion of the New Testament 'saint,' a man who is God's.

God has claimed us for Himself when He gave us Jesus Christ. We respond to the claim when we accept Christ. Henceforth we are not our own, but 'consecrated'—that is, 'saints.'

Now the next step is purity, which is the ordinary idea of sanctity. Purity will follow consecration, and would not be worth much without it, even if it was possible to be attained. Now, look what a far deeper and nobler idea of the service and conditions of moral goodness this derivation of it from surrender to God gives, than does a God-ignoring morality which talks and talks about acts and dispositions, and never goes down to the root of the whole matter; and how much nobler it is than a shallow religion which in like manner is ever straining after acts of righteousness, and forgets that in order to be right there must be prior surrender to God. Get a man to yield himself up to God and no fear about the righteousness. Virtue, goodness, purity, righteousness, all these synonyms express very noble things; but deep down below them all lies the New Testament idea of holiness, consecration of myself to God, which is the parent of them all.

And then the next thing to remind you of is that this consecration is to be applied all through a man's nature. Yielding yourselves to God is the talismanic secret of all righteousness, as I have said; and every part of our complex, manifold being is capable of such consecration. I hallow my heart if its love twines round His heart. I hallow my thoughts if I take His truth for my guide, and ever seek to be led thereby in practice and in belief. I hallow my will when it bows and says, 'Speak, Lord! Thy servant heareth!' I hallow my senses when I use them as from Him, with recognition of Him and for Him. In fact, there are two ways of living in the world; and, narrow as it sounds, I venture to say there are only two. Either God is my centre, and that is holiness; or self is my centre, in more or less subtle forms, and that is sin.

Then the next step is that this consecration, which will issue in all purity, and will cover the whole ground of a human life, is only possible when we have drunk in the blessed thought 'beloved of God.' My yielding of myself to Him can only be the echo of His giving of Himself to me. He must be the first to love. You cannot argue a man into loving God, any more than you can hammer a rosebud open. If you do you spoil its petals. But He can love us into loving Him, and the sunshine, falling on the closed flower, will expand it, and it will grow by its reception of the light, and grow sunlike in its measure and according to its nature. So a God who has only claims upon us will never be a God to whom we yield ourselves. A God who has love for us will be a God to whom it is blessed that we should be consecrated, and so saints.

Then, still further, this consecration, thus built upon the reception of the divine love, and influencing our whole nature, and leading to all purity, is a universal characteristic of Christians. There is no faith which does not lead to surrender. There is no aristocracy in the Christian Church which deserves to have the family name given especially to it. 'Saint' this, and 'Saint' that, and 'Saint' the other—these titles cannot be used without darkening the truth that this honour and obligation of being saints belong equally to all that love Jesus Christ. All the men whom thus God has drawn to Himself, by His love in His Son, they are all, if I may so say, objectively holy; they belong to God. But consecration may be cultivated, and must be cultivated and increased. There is a solemn obligation laid upon every one of us who call ourselves Christians, to be saints, in the sense that we have consciously yielded up our whole lives to Him; and are trying, body, soul, and spirit, 'to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.'

Paul's letter, addressed to the 'beloved in God,' the 'called saints' that are in Rome, found its way to the people for whom it was meant. If a letter so addressed were dropped in our streets, do you think anybody would bring it to you, or to any Christian society as a whole, recognising that we were the people for whom it was meant? The world has taunted us often enough with the name of saints; and laughed at the profession which they thought was included in the word. Would that their taunts had been undeserved, and that it were not true that 'saints' in the Church sometimes means less than 'good men' out of the Church! 'Seeing that we have these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.'

PAUL'S LONGING[1]

'I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; 12. That is, that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me.'—ROMANS i. 11, 12.

I AM not wont to indulge in personal references in the pulpit, but I cannot but yield to the impulse to make an exception now, and to let our happy circumstances mould my remarks. I speak mainly to mine own people, and I must trust that other friends who may hear or read my words will forgive my doing so.

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[1] Preached after long absence on account of illness.

In taking such a text as this, I desire to shelter myself behind Paul, and in expounding his feelings to express my own, and to draw such lessons as may be helpful and profitable to us all. And so there are three things in this text that I desire to note: the manly expression of Christian affection; the lofty consciousness of the purpose of their meeting; and the lowly sense that there was much to be received as well as much to be given. A word or two about each of these things is all on which I can venture.

I. First, then, notice the manly expression of Christian affection which the Apostle allows himself here.

Very few Christian teachers could or should venture to talk so much about themselves as Paul did. The strong infusion of the personal element in all his letters is so transparently simple, so obviously sincere, so free from any jarring note of affectation or unctuous sentiment that it attracts rather than repels. If I might venture upon a paradox, his personal references are instances of self-oblivion in the midst of self-consciousness.

He had never been in Rome when he wrote these words; he had no personal relations with the believers there; he had never looked them in the face; there were no sympathy and confidence between them, as the growth of years. But still his heart went out towards them, and he was not ashamed to show it. 'I *long* to see you,'—in the original the word expresses a very intense amount of yearning blended with something of regret that he had been so long kept from them.

Now it is not a good thing for people to make many professions of affection, and I think a public teacher has something better to do than to parade such feelings before his audiences. But there are exceptions to all rules, and I suppose I may venture to let my heart speak, and to say how gladly I come back to the old place, dear to me by so many sacred memories and associations, and how gladly I reknit the bonds of an affection which has been unbroken, and deepening on both sides through thirty long years.

Dear friends! let us together thank God to-day if He has knit our hearts together in mutual affection; and if you and I can look each other, as I believe we can, in the eyes, with the assurance that I see only the faces of friends, and that you see the face of one who gladly resumes the old work and associations.

But now, dear brethren, let us draw one lesson. Unless there be this manly, honest, though oftenest silent, Christian affection, the sooner you and I part the better. Unless it be in my heart I can do you no good. No man ever touched another with the sweet constraining forces that lie in Christ's Gospel unless the heart of the speaker went out to grapple the hearts of the hearers. And no audience ever listen with any profit to a man when they come in the spirit of carping criticism, or of cold admiration, or of stolid indifference. There must be for this simple relationship which alone binds a Nonconformist preacher to his congregation, as a *sine qua non* of all higher things and of all spiritual good, a real, though oftenest it be a concealed, mutual affection and regard. We have to thank God for much of it; let us try to get more. That is all I want to say about the first point here.

II. Note the lofty consciousness of the purpose of their meeting.

'I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift.' Paul knew that he had something which he could give to these people, and he calls it by a very comprehensive term, 'some spiritual gift'—a gift of some sort which, coming from the Divine Spirit, was to be received into the human spirit.

Now that expression—a spiritual gift—in the New Testament has a variety of applications. Sometimes it refers to what we call miraculous endowments, sometimes it refers to what we may call official capacity; but here it is evidently neither the one nor the other of these more limited and special things, but the general idea of a divine operation upon the human spirit which fills it with Christian graces—knowledge, faith, love. Or, in simpler words, what Paul wanted to give them was a firmer grasp and fuller possession of Jesus Christ, His love and power, which would secure a deepening and strengthening of their whole Christian life. He was quite sure he had this to give, and that he could impart it, if they would listen to what he would say to them. But whilst thus he rises into the lofty conception of the purpose and possible result of his meeting the Roman Christians, he is just as conscious of the limitations of his power in the matter as he is of the greatness of his function. These are indicated plainly. The word which he employs here, 'gift,' is never used in the New Testament for a thing that one man can give to another, but is always employed for the concrete results of the grace of God bestowed upon men. The very expression, then, shows that Paul thought of himself, not as the original giver, but simply as a channel through which was communicated what God had given. In the same direction points the adjective which accompanies the noun—a '*spiritual* gift'—which probably describes the origin of the gift as being the Spirit of God, rather than defines the seat of it when received as being the spirit of the receiver. Notice, too, as bearing on the limits of Paul's part in the gift, the propriety and delicacy of the language in his statement of the ultimate purpose of the gift. He does not say 'that I may strengthen you,' which might have sounded too egotistical, and would have assumed too much to himself, but he says 'that ye may be strengthened,' for the true strengthener is not Paul, but the Spirit of God.

So, on the one hand, the Christian teacher is bound to rise to the height of the consciousness of his lofty vocation as having in possession a gift that he can bestow; on the other hand, he is bound ever to remember the limitations within which that is true—viz. that the gift is not his, but God's, and that the Spirit of the Lord is the true Giver of all the graces which may blossom when His word, ministered by human agents, is received into human hearts.

And, now, what are the lessons that I take from this? Two very simple ones. First, no Christian teacher has any business to open his mouth, unless he is sure that he has received something to impart to men as a gift from the Divine Spirit. To preach our doubts, to preach our own opinions, to preach poor platitudes, to talk about politics and morals and taste and literature and the like in the pulpit, is profanation and blasphemy. Let no man open his lips unless he can say: 'The Lord hath showed me this; and this I bring to you as His word.' Nor has a Christian organisation any right to exist, unless it recognises the communication and reception and further spreading of this spiritual gift as its great function. Churches which have lost that consciousness, and, instead of a divine gift, have little more to offer than formal worship, or music, or entertainments, or mere intellectual discourse, whether orthodox or 'advanced,' have no right to be; and by the law of the survival of the fittest will not long be. The one thing that warrants such a relationship as subsists between you and me is this, my consciousness that I have a message from God, and your belief that you hear such from my lips. Unless that be our bond the sooner these walls crumble, and this voice ceases, and these pews are emptied, the better. 'I have,' says, Paul, 'a gift to impart; and I long to see you that I may impart it to you.' Oh! for more, in all our pulpits, of that burdened consciousness of a divine message which needs the relief of speech, and longs with a longing caught from Christ to impart its richest treasures.

That is the one lesson. And the other one is this. Have you, dear friends, received the gift that I have, under the limitations already spoken of, to bestow? There are some of you who have listened to my voice ever since you were children—some of you, though not many, have heard it for well on to thirty years. Have you taken the thing that all these years I have been—God knows how poorly, but God knows how honestly—trying to bring to you? That is, have you taken Christ, and have you faith in Him? And, as for those of you who say that you are Christians, many blessings have passed between you and me through all these years; but, dear friends, has the chief blessing been attained? Are you being strengthened day by day for the burdens and the annoyances and the sorrows of life by your coming here? Do I do you any good in that way; are you better men than when we first met together? Is Christ dearer, and more real and nearer to you; and are your lives more transparently consecrated, more manifestly the result of a hidden union with Him? Do you walk in the world like the Master, because you are members of this congregation? If so, its purpose has been accomplished. If not, it has miserably failed.

I have said that I have to thank God for the unbroken affection that has knit us together. But what is the use of such love if it does not lead onwards to this? I have had enough, and more than enough, of what you call popularity and appreciation, undeserved enough, but rendered unstintedly by you. I do not care the snap of a finger for it by comparison with this other thing. And oh, dear brethren! if all that comes of our meeting here Sunday after Sunday is either praise or criticism of my poor words and ways, our relationship is a curse, and not a blessing, and we come together for the worse and not for the better. The purpose of the Church, and the purpose of the ministry, and the meaning of our assembling are, that spiritual gifts may be imparted, not by me alone, but by you, too, and by me in my place and measure, and if that purpose be not accomplished, all other purposes, that are accomplished, are of no account, and worse than nothing.

III. And now, lastly, note the lowly consciousness that much was to be received as well as much to be given.

The Apostle corrects himself after he has said 'that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift,' by adding, 'that is, that I may be comforted (or rather, encouraged) together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.' If his language were not so transparently sincere, and springing from deep interest in the relationship between himself and these people, we should say that it was exquisite courtesy and beautiful delicacy. But it moves in a region far more real than the region of courtesy, and it speaks the inmost truth about the conditions on which the Roman Christians should receive—viz. that they should also give. There is only one Giver who is only a Giver, and that is God. All other givers are also receivers. Paul desired to see his Roman brethren that he might be encouraged; and when he did see them, as he marched along the Appian Way, a shipwrecked prisoner, the Acts of the Apostles tells us, 'He thanked God and took courage.' The sight of them strengthened him and prepared him for what lay before him.

Paul's was a richly complicated nature—firm as a rock in its will, tremulously sensitive in its sympathies; like some strongly-rooted tree with its stable stem and a green cloud of fluttering foliage that moves in the lightest air. So his spirit rose and fell according to the reception that he met from his brethren, and the manifestation of their faith quickened and strengthened his.

And he is but one instance of a universal law. All teachers, the more genuine they are, the more sympathetic they are, are the more sensitive of their environment. The very oratorical temperament places a man at the mercy of surroundings. All earnest work has ever travelling with it as its shadow seasons of deep depression; and the Christian teacher does not escape these. I am not going to speak about myself, but this is unquestionably true, that every Elijah, after the mightiest effort of prophecy, is apt to cover his head in his mantle and to say, 'Take me away; I am not better than my fathers.' And when a man for thirty years, amidst all the changes incident to a great city congregation in that time, has to stand up Sunday after Sunday before the same people, and mark how some of them are stolidly indifferent, and note how others are dropping away from their faithfulness, and see empty places where loving forms used to sit—no wonder that the mood comes ever and anon, 'Then, said I, surely I have laboured in vain and spent my strength for nought.' The hearer reacts on the speaker quite as much as the speaker does on the hearer. If you have ice in the pews, that brings down the temperature up here. It is hard to be fervid amidst people that are all but dead. It is difficult to keep a fire alight when it is kindled on the top of an iceberg. And the unbelief and low-toned religion of a congregation are always pulling down the faith and the fervour of their minister, if he be better and holier, as they expect him to be, than they are.

'He did not many works because of their unbelief.' Christ knew the hampering and the restrictions of His power which came from being surrounded by a chill, unsympathetic environment. My strength and my weakness are largely due to you. And if you want your minister to preach better, and in all ways to do his work more joyfully and faithfully, the means lie largely in your own hands. Icy indifference, ill-natured interpretations, carping criticisms, swift forgetfulness of one's words, all these things kill the fervour of the pulpit.

On the other hand, the true encouragement to give a man when he is trying to do God's will, to preach Christ's Gospel, is not to pat him on the back and say, 'What a remarkable sermon that was of yours! what a genius! what an orator!' not to go about praising it, but to come and say, 'Thy words have led me to Christ, and from thee I have taken the gift of gifts.'

Dear brethren, the encouragement of the minister is in the conversion and the growth of the hearers. And I pray that in this new lease of united fellowship which we have taken out, be it longer or shorter—and advancing years tell me that at the longest it must be comparatively short—I may come to you ever more and more with the lofty and humbling consciousness that I have a message which Christ has given to me, and that you may come more and more receptive—not of *my* words, God forbid—but of Christ's truth; and that so we may be helpers one of another, and encourage each other in the warfare and work to which we all are called and consecrated.

DEBTORS TO ALL MEN

'I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise.'—ROMANS i. 14.

No doubt Paul is here referring to the special obligation laid upon him by his divine call to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. He was entrusted with the Gospel as a steward, and was therefore bound to carry it to all sorts and conditions of men. But the principle underlying the statement applies to all Christians. The indebtedness referred to is no peculiarity of the Apostolic order, but attaches to every believer. Every servant of Jesus Christ, who has received the truth for himself, has received it as a steward, and is, as such, indebted to God, from whom he got the trust, and to the men for whom he got it. The only limit to the obligation is, as Paul says in the context, 'as much as in me is.' Capacity, determined by faculties, opportunities, and circumstances, prescribes the kind and the degree of the work to be done in discharge of the obligation; but the obligation is universal. We are not at liberty to choose whether we shall do our part in spreading the name of Jesus Christ. It is a debt that we owe to God and to men. Is that the view of duty which the average Christian man takes? I am afraid it is not. If it were, our treasuries would be full, and great would be the multitude of them that preached the Word.

It is no very exalted degree of virtue to pay our debts. We do not expect to be praised for that; and we do not consider that we are at liberty to choose whether we shall do it or not. We are dishonest if we do not. It is no merit in us to be honest. Would that all Christian people applied that principle to their religion. The world would be different, and the Church would be different, if they did.

Let me try, then, to enforce this thought of indebtedness and of common honesty in discharging the indebtedness, which underlies these words. Paul thought that he went a long way to pay his debts to humanity by carrying to everybody whom he could reach the 'Name that is above every name.'

I. Now, first, let me say that we Christians are debtors to all men by our common manhood.

It is not the least of the gifts which Christianity has brought to the world, that it has introduced the new thought of the brotherhood of mankind. The very word 'humanity' is a Christian coinage, and it was coined to express the new thought that began to throb in men's hearts, as soon as they accepted the message that Jesus Christ came to give, the message of the Fatherhood of God. For it is on that belief of God's Fatherhood that the belief of man's brotherhood rests, and on it alone can it be secured and permanently based.

Here is a Jew writing to Latins in the Greek language. The phenomenon itself is a sign of a new order of things, of the rising of a flood that had surged over, and in the course of ages would sap away and dissolve, the barriers between men. The Apostle points to two of the widest gulfs that separated men, in the words of my text. 'Greeks and Barbarians' divides mankind, according to race and language. 'Wise and unwise' divides them according to culture and intellectual capacity. Both gulfs exist still, though they have been wonderfully filled up by the influence, direct and indirect, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The fiercest antagonisms of race which still subsist are felt to belong to a decaying order, and to be sure, sooner or later, to pass away. I suppose that the gulf made by the increased culture of modern society between civilised and the savage peoples, and, within the limits of our own land, the gulf made by education between the higher and the lower layers of our community—I speak not of higher and lower in regard to wealth or station, but in regard to intellectual acquirement and capacity—are greater than, perhaps, they ever were in the past. But yet over the gulf a bridge is thrown, and the gulf itself is being filled up. High above all the superficial distinctions which separate Jew and Gentile, Greek and Barbarian, educated and illiterate scientific and unscientific, wise and unwise, there stretches the great rainbow of the truth that all are one in Christ Jesus. Fraternity without Fatherhood is a ghastly mockery that ended a hundred years ago in the guillotine, and to-day will end in disappointment; and it is little more than cant. But when Christianity comes and tells us that we have one Father and one Redeemer, then the unity of the race is secured.

And that oneness which makes us debtors to all men is shown to be real by the fact that, beneath all superficial distinctions of culture, race, age, or station, there are the primal necessities and yearnings and possibilities that lie in every human soul. All men, savage or cultivated, breathe the same air, see by the same light, are fed by the same food and drink, have the same yearning hearts, the same lofty aspirations that unfulfilled are torture; the same experience of the same guilt, and, blessed be God! the same Saviour and the same salvation.

Because, then, we are all members of the one family, every man is bound to regard all that he possesses, and is, and can do, as committed to him in stewardship to be imparted to his fellows. We are not sponges to absorb, but we are pipes placed in the spring, that we may give forth the precious water of life.

Cain is not a very good model, but his question is the world's question, and it implies the expectation of a negative answer—'Am I my brother's keeper?' Surely, the very language answers itself, and, although Cain thinks that the only answer is 'No,' wisdom sees that the only answer is 'Yes.' For if I am my brother's brother, then surely I am my brother's keeper. We have a better example. There is another Elder Brother who has come to give to His brethren all that Hims possessed, and we but poorly follow our Master's pattern unless we feel that the mystic tie which binds us in brotherhood to every man makes us every man's debtor to the extent of our possessions. That is the Christian truth that underlies the modern Socialistic idea, and, whatever the form in which it is ultimately brought into practice as the rule of mankind, the principle will triumph one day; and we are bound, as Christian men, to hasten the coming of its victory. We are debtors by reason of our common humanity.

II. We are debtors by our possession of the universal salvation.

The principle which I have already been laying down applies all round, to everything that we have, are, or can do. But its most stringent obligation, and the noblest field for its operations, are found in reference to the Christian man's possession of the Gospel for the joy of his own heart, and to the duties that are therein involved. Christ draws men to Himself for their own sakes, blessed be His name! but not for their own sakes only. He draws them to Himself, that they, in their turn, may draw others with whose hands theirs are linked, and so may swell the numbers of the flock that gathers round the one Shepherd. He puts the dew of His blessing into the chalice of the tiniest flower, that it may 'share its dewdrop with another near.' Just as every particle of inert dough as it is leavened becomes in its turn leaven, and the medium for leavening the particle contiguous to it, so every Christian is bound, or, to use the metaphor of my text, is a debtor to God and man, to impart the Gospel of Jesus Christ. 'Greek and Barbarian,' says Paul, 'wise or unwise'; all distinctions vanish. If I can get at a man, no matter what colour, his race, his language, his capacity, his acquirements, he is my creditor, and I am defrauding him of what he has a right to expect from me if I do not do my best to bring him to Jesus Christ.

This obligation receives additional weight from the proved adaptation of the Gospel to all sorts and conditions of men. Alone of all religions has Christianity proved itself capable of dominating every type of character, of influencing every stage of civilisation, of assuming the speech of every tongue, and of wearing the garb of every race. There are other religions which are evidently destined only to a narrow field of operations, and are rigidly limited by geographical conditions, or by stages of civilisation. There are wines that are ruined by a sea voyage, and can only be drunk in the land where the vintage was gathered; and that is the condition of all the ethnic religions. Christianity alone passes through the whole earth, and influences all men. The history of missions shows us that. There has yet to be found the race that is incapable of receiving, or is beyond the need of possessing, or cannot be elevated by the operation of, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

So to all men we are bound, as much as in us is, to carry the Gospel. The distinction that is drawn so often by the people who never move a finger to help the heathen either at home or abroad, between the home and the foreign field of work, vanishes altogether when we stand at the true Christian standpoint. Here is a man who wants the Gospel; I have it; I can give it to him. That constitutes a summons as imperative as if we were called by name from Heaven, and bade to go, and as much as in us is to preach the Gospel. Brethren! we do not obey the command, 'Owe no man anything,' unless, to the extent of our ability, or over the whole field which we can influence at home or abroad, we seek to spread the name of Christ and the salvation that is in Him.

III. We are debtors by benefits received.

I am speaking to men and women a very large proportion of whom get their living, and some of whom amass their wealth, by trade with lands that need the Gospel. It is not for nothing that England has won the great empire that she possesses—won it, alas! far too often by deeds that will not bear investigation in the light of Christian principle, but won it.

What do we owe to the lands that we call 'heathen'? The very speech by which we communicate with one another; the beginning of our civilisation; wide fields for expanding population and emigration; treasures of wisdom of many kinds; an empire about which we are too fond of crowing and too reluctant to recognise its responsibilities—and Manchester its commerce and prosperity! Did God put us where we are as a nation only in order that we might carry the gifts of our literature, great as that is; of our science, great as that is; of our law, blessed as that is; of our manufactures, to those distant lands? The best thing that we can give is the thing that all of us can help to give —the Gospel of Jesus Christ. 'Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'

IV. Lastly, we are debtors by injuries inflicted.

Many subject-races seem destined to fade away by contact with our race; and if we think of the nameless cruelties, and the iliad of woes which England's possession of this great Colonial Empire has had accompanying it, we may feel that the harm in many aspects outweighs the good, and that it had been better for these men to be left suckled in creeds outworn, and ignorant of our civilisation, than to receive from us the fatal gifts that they often have received. I do not wish to exaggerate, but if you will take the facts of the case as brought out by people that have no Christian prejudices to serve, I think you will acknowledge that we as a nation owe a debt of reparation to the barbarians and the unwise.

What about killing African tribes by the thousand with the vile stuff that we call rum, and send to them in exchange for their poor commodities? What about introducing new diseases, the offspring of vice, into the South Sea Islands, decimating and all but destroying the population? Is it not true that, as the prophet wailed of old about a degenerate Israel, we may wail about the beach-combers and other loafers that go amongst savage lands from England—'Through you the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles.' A Hindoo once said to a missionary, 'Your Book is very good. If you were as good as your Book you would conquer India in five years.' That may be true or it may not, but it gives us the impression that is produced by godless Englishmen on heathen peoples. We are taking away their religion from them, necessarily, as the result of education and contact with European thought. And if we do not substitute for it the one faith that elevates and saves, the last state of that man will be worse than the first.

We can almost hear the rattle of the guns on the north-west frontier of India to-day. There is another specimen of the injuries inflicted. This is not the place to talk politics, but I feel that this is the place to ask this question, 'Are Christian principles to have anything to do in determining national actions?' Is it Christian to impose our yoke on unwilling tribes who have as deep a love for independence as the proudest

Englishmen of us all, and as good a right to it? Are punitive expeditions and Maxim guns instalments of our debt to all men? I wonder what Jesus Christ, who died for Afridis and Orakzais and all the rest of them, thinks about such conduct?

Brethren, we are debtors to all men. Let us do our best to influence national action in accordance with the brotherhood which has been revealed to us by the Elder Brother of us all; and let us, at least for our own parts, recognise, and, as much as in us is, discharge the debt which, by our common humanity, and by our possession of the universal Gospel we owe to all men, and which is made more weighty by the benefits we receive from many, and by the injuries which England has inflicted on not a few. Else shall we hear rise above all the voices that palliate crime, on the plea of 'State necessity,' the stern words of the Master, 'In thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of poor innocents.' We are debtors; let us pay our debts.

THE GOSPEL THE POWER OF GOD[1]

'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.'—ROMANS i. 16.

To preach the Gospel in Rome had long been the goal of Paul's hopes. He wished to do in the centre of power what he had done in Athens, the home of wisdom; and with superb confidence, not in himself, but in his message, to try conclusions with the strongest thing in the world. He knew its power well, and was not appalled. The danger was an attraction to his chivalrous spirit. He believed in flying at the head when you are fighting with a serpent, and he knew that influence exerted in Rome would thrill through the Empire. If we would understand the magnificent audacity of these words of my text we must try to listen to them with the ears of a Roman. Here was a poor little insignificant Jew, like hundreds of his countrymen down in the Ghetto, one who had his head full of some fantastic nonsense about a young visionary whom the procurator of Syria had very wisely put an end to a while ago in order to quiet down the turbulent province; and he was going into Rome with the notion that his word would shake the throne of the Cæsars. What proud contempt would have curled their lips if they had been told that the travel-stained prisoner, trudging wearily up the Appian Way, had the mightiest thing in the world entrusted to his care! Romans did not believe much in ideas. Their notion of power was sharp swords and iron yokes on the necks of subject peoples. But the history of Christianity, whatever else it has been, has been the history of the supremacy and the revolutionary force of ideas. Thought is mightier than all visible forces. Thought dissolves and reconstructs. Empires and institutions melt before it like the carbon rods in an electric lamp; and the little hillock of Calvary is higher than the Palatine with its regal homes and the Capitoline with its temples: 'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation.'

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[1] Preached before Baptist Union.

Now, dear friends, I have ventured to take these great words for my text, though I know, better than any of you can tell me, how sure my treatment of them is to enfeeble rather than enforce them, because I, for my poor part, feel that there are few things which we, all of us, people and ministers, need more than to catch some of the infection of this courageous confidence, and to be fired with some spark of Paul's enthusiasm for, and glorying in, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I ask you, then, to consider three things: (1) what Paul thought was the Gospel? (2) what Paul thought the Gospel was? and (3) what he felt about the Gospel?

I. What Paul thought was the Gospel?

He has given to us in his own rapid way a summary statement, abbreviated to the very bone, and reduced to the barest elements, of what he meant by the Gospel. What was the irreducible minimum? The facts of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, as you will find written in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. So, then, to begin with, the Gospel is not a statement of principles, but a record of facts, things that have happened in this world of ours. But the least part of a fact is the visible part of it, and it is of no significance unless it has explanation, and so Paul goes on to bind up with the facts an explanation of them. The mere fact that Jesus, a young Nazarene, was executed is no more a gospel than the other one, that two brigands were crucified beside Him. But the fact that could be seen, plus the explanation which underlies and interprets it, turns the chronicle into a gospel, and the explanation begins with the name of the Sufferer; for if you want to understand His death you must understand who it was that died. His death is a thought pathetic in all aspects, and very precious in many. But when we hear 'Christ died according to the Scriptures,' the whole symbolism of the ancient ritual and all the glowing anticipations of the prophets rise up before us, and that death assumes an altogether different aspect. If we stop with 'Jesus died,' then that death may be a beautiful example of heroism, a sweet, pathetic instance of innocent suffering, a conspicuous example of the world's wages to the world's teachers, but it is little more. If, however, we take Paul's words upon our lips, 'Brethren, I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached . . . how that Christ died . . . according to the Scriptures,' the fact flashes up into solid beauty, and becomes the Gospel of our salvation. And the explanation goes on, 'How that Christ died for our sins.' Now, I may be very blind, but I venture to say that I, for my part, cannot see in what intelligible sense the Death of Christ can be held to have been for, or on behalf of, our sins—that is, that they may be swept away and we delivered from them—unless you admit the atoning nature of His sacrifice for sins. I cannot stop to enlarge, but I venture to say that any narrower interpretation evacuates Paul's words of their deepest significance. The explanation goes on, 'And that He was buried.' Why that trivial detail? Partly because it guarantees the fact of His Death, partly because of its bearing on the evidences of His Resurrection. 'And that He rose from the dead according to the Scriptures.' Great fact, without which Christ is a shattered prop, and 'ye are yet in your sins.'

But, further, notice that my text is also Paul's text for this Epistle, and that it differs from the condensed summary of which I have been speaking only as a bud with its petals closed differs from one with them expanded in their beauty. And now, if you will take the words of my text as being the keynote of this letter, and read over its first eight chapters, what is the Apostle talking about when he in them fulfils his purpose and preaches 'the Gospel' to them that are at Rome also? Here is, in the briefest possible words, his summary—the universality of sin, the awful burden of guilt, the tremendous outlook of penalty, the impossibility of man rescuing himself or living righteously, the Incarnation, and Life, and Death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, the hand of faith grasping the offered blessing, the indwelling in believing souls of the Divine Spirit, and the consequent admission of man into a life of sonship, power, peace, victory, glory, the child's place in the love of the Father from which nothing can separate. These are the teachings which make the staple of this Epistle. These are the explanations of the weighty phrases of my text. These are at least the essential elements of the Gospel according to Paul.

But he was not alone in this construction of his message. We hear a great deal to-day about Pauline Christianity, with the implication, and sometimes with the assertion, that he was the inventor of what, for the sake of using a brief and easily intelligible term, I may call Evangelical Christianity. Now, it is a very illuminating thought for the reading of the New Testament that there are the three sets of teaching, roughly, the Pauline, Petrine, and Johannine, and you cannot find the distinctions between these three in any difference as to the fundamental contents of the Gospel; for if Paul rings out, 'God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us,' Peter declares, 'Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree,' and John, from his island solitude, sends across the waters the hymn of praise, 'Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.' And so the proud declaration of the Apostle, which he dared not have ventured upon in the face of the acrid criticism he had to front unless he had known he was perfectly sure of his ground, is natural and warranted—'Therefore, whether it were I or they, so we preach.'

We are told that we must go back to the Christ of the Gospels, the historical Christ, and that He spoke nothing concerning all these important points that I have mentioned as being Paul's conception of the Gospel. Back to the Christ of the Gospels by all means, if you will go to the Christ of all the Gospels and of the whole of each Gospel. And if you do, you will go back to the Christ who said, 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.' You will go back to the Christ who said, 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.' You will go back to the Christ who said, 'The bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' You will go back to the Christ who bade His followers hold in everlasting memory, not the tranquil beauty of His life, not the persuasive sweetness of His gracious words, not the might of His miracles of blessing, but the mysterious agonies of His last hours, by which He would have us learn that there lie the secret of His power, the foundation of our hopes, the stimulus of our service.

Now, brethren, I have ventured to dwell so long upon this matter, because it is no use talking about the Gospel unless we understand what we mean by it, and I, for my part, venture to say that that is what Paul meant by it, and that is what I mean by it. I plead for no narrow interpretation of the phrases of my text. I would not that they should be used to check in the smallest degree the diversities of representation which, according to the differences of individual character, must ever prevail in the conceptions which we form and which we preach of this Gospel of Jesus Christ. I want no parrot-like repetition of a certain set of phrases embodied, however great may be their meanings, in every sermon. And I would that the people to whom those truths are true would make more allowance than they sometimes do for the differences to which I have referred, and would show a great deal more sympathy than they often do to those, especially those young men, who, with their faces toward Christ, have not yet grown to the full acceptance of all that is implied in those gracious words. There is room for a whole world of thought in the Gospel of Christ as Paul conceived it, with all the deep foundations of implication and presupposition on which it rests, and with all the, as yet, undiscovered range of conclusions to which it may lead. Remember that the Cross of Christ is the key to the universe, and sends its influence into every region of human thought.

II. What Paul thought the Gospel was.

'The power of God unto salvation.' There was in the background of the Apostle's mind a kind of tacit reference to the antithetical power that he was going up to meet, the power of Rome, and we may trace that in the words of my text. Rome, as I have said, was the embodiment of physical force, with no great faith in ideas. And over against this carnal might Paul lifts the undissembled weakness of the Cross, and declares that it is stronger than man, 'the power of God unto salvation.' Rome is high in force; Athens is higher; the Cross is highest of all, and it comes shrouded in weakness having a poor Man hanging dying there. That is a strange embodiment of divine power. Yes, and because so strange, it is so touching, and so conquering. The power that is draped in weakness is power indeed. Though Rome's power did make for righteousness sometimes, yet its stream of tendency was on the whole a power to destruction and grasped the nations of the earth as some rude hand might do rich clusters of grapes and squeeze them into a formless mass. The tramp of the legionary meant death, and it was true in many respects of them what was afterwards said of later invaders of Europe, that where their horses' hoofs had once stamped no grass ever grew. Over against this terrific engine of destruction Paul lifts up the meek forces of love which have for their sole object the salvation of man.

Then we come to another of the keywords about which it is very needful that people should have deeper and wider notions than they often seem to cherish. What is salvation? Negatively, the removal and sweeping away of all evil, physical and moral, as the schools speak. Positively, the inclusion of all good for every part of the composite nature of a man which the man can receive and which God can bestow. And that is the task that the Gospel sets to itself. Now, I need not remind you how, for the execution of such a purpose, it is plain that something else than man's power is absolutely essential. It is only God who can alter my relation to His government. It is only God who can trammel up the inward consequences of my sins and prevent them from scourging me. It is only God who can bestow upon my death a new life, which shall grow up into righteousness and beauty, caught of, and kindred to, His own. But if this be the aim of the Gospel, then its diagnosis of man's sickness is a very much graver one than that which finds favour amongst so many of us now. Salvation is a bigger word than any of the little gospels that we hear clamouring round about us are able to utter. It means something a great deal more than either social or intellectual, or still more, material or political betterment of man's condition. The disease lies so deep, and so great are the destruction and loss partly experienced, and still more awfully impending over every soul of us, that something else than tinkering at the outsides, or dealing, as self-culture does, with man's understanding or, as social gospels do, with man's economical and civic condition, should be brought to bear. Dear brethren, especially you Christian ministers, preach a social Christianity by all means, an applied Christianity, for there does lie in the Gospel of Jesus Christ a key to all the problems that afflict our social condition. But be sure first that there is a Christianity before you talk about applying it. And remember that the process of salvation begins in the deep heart of the individual and transforms him first and foremost. The power is 'to every one that believeth.' It is power in its most universal sweep. Rome's Empire was wellnigh ubiquitous, but, blessed be God, the dove of Christ flies farther than the Roman eagle with beak and claw ready for rapine, and wherever there are men here is a Gospel for them. The limitation is no limitation of its universality. It is no limitation of the claim of a medicine to be a panacea that it will only do good to the man who swallows it. And that is the only limitation of which the Gospel is susceptible, for we have all the same deep needs, the same longings; we are fed by the same bread, we are nourished by the same draughts of water, we breathe the same air, we have the same sins, and, thanks be to God, we have the same Saviour. 'The power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.'

Now before I pass from this part of my subject there is only one thing more that I want to say, and that is, that you cannot apply that glowing language about 'the power of God unto salvation' to anything but the Gospel that Paul preached. Forms of Christianity which have lost the significance of the Incarnation and Death of Jesus Christ, and which have struck out or obscured the central facts with which I have been dealing, are not, never were, and, I may presumptuously venture to say, never will be, forces of large account in this world. Here is a clock, beautiful, chased on the back, with a very artistic dial-plate, and works modelled according to the most approved fashion, but, somehow or other, the thing won't go. Perhaps the mainspring is broken. And so it is only the Gospel, as Paul expounds it and expands it in this Epistle, that is 'the power of God unto salvation.' Dear brethren, in the course of a sermon like this, of course, one must lay himself open to the charge of dogmatising. That cannot be helped under the conditions of my space. But let me say as my own solemn conviction—I know that that is not worth much to you, but it is my justification for speaking in such a fashion—let me say as my solemn conviction that you may as well take the keystone out of an arch, with nothing to hold the other stones together or keep them from toppling in hideous ruin on your unfortunate head, as take the doctrine that Paul summed up in that one word out of your conception of Christianity and expect it to work. And be sure of this, that there is only one Name that lords it over the demons of afflicted humanity, and that if a man goes and tries to eject them with any less potent charm than Paul's Gospel, they will turn upon him with 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?'

III. What Paul felt about this Gospel.

His restrained expression, 'I am not ashamed,' is the stronger for its very moderation. It witnesses to the fixed purpose of his heart and attitude of his mind, whilst it suggests that he was well aware of all the temptations in Rome to being ashamed of it there. Think of what was arrayed against him—venerable religion, systematised philosophies, bitter hatred and prejudice, material power and wealth. These were the brazen armour of Goliath, and this little David went cheerily down into the valley with five pebble stones in a leathern wallet, and was quite sure how it was going to end. And it ended as he expected. His Gospel shook the kingdom of the Roman, and cast it in another mould.

And there are temptations, plenty of them, for us, dear friends, to-day, to bate our confidence. The drift of what calls itself influential opinion is anti-supernatural, and we all are conscious of the presence of that element all round about us. It tells with special force upon our younger men, but it affects us all. In this day, when a large portion of the periodical press, which does the thinking for most of us, looks askance at these truths, and when, on the principle that in the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is the king, popular novelists become our theological tutors, and when every new publishing season brings out a new conclusive destruction of

Christianity, which supersedes last season's equally complete destruction, it is hard for some of us to keep our flags flying. The ice round about us will either bring down the temperature, or, if it stimulates us to put more fuel on the fire, perhaps the fire may melt it. And so the more we feel ourselves encompassed by these temptations, the louder is the call to Christian men to cast themselves back on the central verities, and to draw at first hand from them the inspiration which shall be their safety. And how is that to be done? Well, there are many ways by which thoughtful, and cultivated, students may do it. But may I venture to deal here rather with ways which all Christian people have open before them? And I am bold to say that the way to be sure of 'the power of God unto salvation' is to submit ourselves continually to its cleansing and renewing influence. This certitude, brethren, may be contributed to by books of apologetics, and by other sources of investigation and study which I should be sorry indeed to be supposed in any degree to depreciate. But the true way to get it is, by deep communion with the living God, to realise the personality of Jesus Christ as present with us, our Friend, our Saviour, our Sanctifier by His Holy Spirit. Why, Paul's Gospel was, I was going to say, altogether—that would be an exaggeration—but it was to a very large extent simply the generalisation of his own experience. That is what all of us will find to be the Gospel that we have to preach. 'We speak that we do know and testify that we have seen.' And it was because this man could say so assuredly—because the depths of his own conscience and the witness within him bore testimony to it—'He loved me and gave Himself for me,' that he could also say, 'The power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.' Go down into the depths, brother and friend; cry to Him out of the depths. Then you will feel His strong, gentle grip lifting you to the heights, and that will give power that nothing else will, and you will be able to say, 'I have heard Him myself, and I know that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

But there is yet another source of certitude open to us all, and that is the history of the centuries. Our modern sceptics, attacking the truth of Christianity mostly from the physical side, are strangely blind to the worth of history. It is a limitation of faculty that besets them in a good many directions, but it does not work anywhere more fatally than it does in their attitude towards the Gospel. After all, Jesus Christ spoke the ultimate word when He said, 'By their fruits ye shall know them.' And it is so, because just as what is morally wrong cannot be politically right, so what is intellectually false cannot be morally good. Truth, goodness, beauty, they are but three names for various aspects of one thing, and if it be that the difference between B.C. and A.D. has come from a Gospel which is not the truth of God, then all I can say is, that the richest vintage that ever the world saw, and the noblest wine of which it ever drank, did grow upon a thorn. I know that the Christian Church has sinfully and tragically failed to present Christ adequately to the world. But for all that, 'Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord'; and nobler manners and purer laws have come in the wake of this Gospel of Jesus Christ. And as I look round about upon what Christianity has done in the world, I venture to say, 'Show us any system of religion or of no religion that has done that or anything the least like it, and then we will discuss with you the other evidences of the Gospel.'

In closing these words, may I venture relying on the melancholy privilege of seniority, to drop for a minute or two into a tone of advice? I would say, do not be frightened out of your confidence either by the premature pæan of victory from the opposite camp, or by timid voices in our own ranks. And that you may not be so frightened, be sure to keep clear in your mind the distinction between the things that can be shaken and the kingdom that cannot be moved. It is bad strategy to defend an elongated line. It is cowardice to treat the capture of an outpost as involving the evacuation of the key of the position. It is a mistake, to which many good Christian people are sorely tempted in this day, to assert such a connection between the eternal Gospel and our deductions from the principles of that Gospel as that the refutation of the one must be the overthrow of the other. And if it turns out to be so in any case, a large part of the blame lies upon those good and mistaken people who insist that everything must be held or all must be abandoned. The burning questions of this day about the genuineness of the books of Scripture, inspiration, inerrancy, and the like, are not so associated with this word, 'God so loved the world . . . that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,' as that the discovery of errors in the Second Book of Chronicles shakes the foundations of the Christian certitude. In a day like this truth must change its vesture. Who believes that the Dissenting Churches of England are the highest, perfect embodiment of the Kingdom of God? And who believes that any creed of man's making has in it all and has in it only the everlasting Gospel? So do not be frightened, and do not think that when the things that can be shaken are removed, the things that cannot be shaken are at all less likely to remain. Depend upon it, the Gospel, whose outline I have imperfectly tried to set before you now, will last as long as men on earth know they are sinners and need a Saviour. Did you ever see some mean buildings that have by degrees been gathered round the sides of some majestic cathedral, and do you suppose that the sweeping away of those shanties would touch the solemn majesty of the mediæval glories of the building that rises above them? Take them away if need be, and it, in its proportion, beauty, strength, and heavenward aspiration, will stand more glorious for the sweeping away. Preach positive truth. Do not preach doubts. You remember Mr. Kingsley's book *Yeast*. Its title was its condemnation. Yeast is not meant to be drunk; it is meant to be kept in the dark till the process of fermentation goes on and it works itself clear, and then you may bring it out. Do not be always arguing with the enemy. It is a great deal better to preach the truth. Remember what Jesus said: 'Let them alone, they are blind leaders of the blind, they will fall into the ditch.' It is not given to every one of us to conduct controversial arguments in the pulpit. There are some much wiser and abler brethren amongst us than you or I who can do it. Let us be contented with, not the humbler but the more glorious, office of telling what we have known, leaving it, as it will do, to prove itself. You remember what the old woman, who had been favoured by her pastor with an elaborate sermon to demonstrate the existence of God, said when he had finished; 'Well, I believe there is a God, for all the gentleman says.'

As one who sees the lengthening shadows falling over the darkening field, may I say one word to my junior brethren, with all whose struggles and doubts and difficulties I, for one, do most tenderly sympathise? I beseech them—though, alas! the advice condemns the giver of it as he looks back over long years of his ministry—to be faithful to the Gospel how that 'Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.' Dear young friends, if you only go where Paul went, and catch the inspiration that he caught there, your path will be clear. It was in contact with Christ, whose passion for soul-winning brought Him from heaven, that Paul learned his passion for soul-winning. And if you and I are touched with the divine enthusiasm, and have that aim clear before us, we shall soon find out that there is only one power, one name given under heaven among men whereby we can accomplish what we desire—the name of 'Jesus Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, and also maketh intercession for us.' If our aim is clear before us it will prescribe our methods, and if the inspiration of our ministry is, 'I determine not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified,' then, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, they shall know that there hath been a Prophet among them.

WORLD-WIDE SIN AND WORLD-WIDE REDEMPTION

'Now we know, that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law.; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. 21. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; 22. Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference: 23. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God: 24. Being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; 25. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26. To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness; that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.'—ROMANS iii. 19-26.

LET us note in general terms the large truths which this passage contains. We may mass these under four heads:

I. Paul's view of the purpose of the law.

He has been quoting a mosaic of Old Testament passages from the Psalms and Isaiah. He regards these as part of 'the law,' which term, therefore, in his view, here includes the whole previous revelation, considered as making known God's will as to man's conduct. Every word of God, whether promise, or doctrine, or specific command, has in it some element bearing on conduct. God reveals nothing only in order that we may know, but all that, knowing, we may do and be what is pleasing in His sight. All His words are law.

But Paul sets forth another view of its purpose here; namely, to drive home to men's consciences the conviction of sin. That is not the only purpose, for God reveals duty primarily in order that men may do it, and His law is meant to be obeyed. But, failing obedience, this second purpose comes into action, and His law is a swift witness against sin. The more clearly we know our duty, the more poignant will be our consciousness of failure. The light which shines to show the path of right, shines to show our deviations from it. And that conviction of sin, which it was the very purpose of all the previous Revelation to produce, is a merciful gift; for, as the Apostle implies, it is the prerequisite to the faith which saves.

As a matter of fact, there was a far profounder and more inward conviction of sin among the Jews than in any heathen nation. Contrast the wailings of many a psalm with the tone in Greek or Roman literature. No doubt there is a law written on men's hearts which evokes a lower measure of the same consciousness of sin. There are prayers among the Assyrian and Babylonian tablets which might almost stand beside the Fifty-first Psalm; but, on the whole, the deep sense of sin was the product of the revealed law. The best use of our consciousness of what we ought to be, is when it rouses conscience to feel the discordance with it of what we are, and so drives us to Christ. Law, whether in the Old Testament, or as written in our hearts by their very make, is the slave whose task is to bring us to Christ, who will give us power to keep God's commandments.

Another purpose of the law is stated in verse 21, as being to bear witness, in conjunction with the prophets, to a future more perfect revelation of God's righteousness. Much of the law was symbolic and prophetic. The ideal it set forth could not always remain unfulfilled. The whole attitude of that system was one of forward-looking expectancy. There is much danger lest, in modern investigations as to the authorship, date, and genesis of the Old Testament revelation, its central characteristic should be lost sight of; namely, its pointing onwards to a more perfect revelation which should supersede it.

II. Paul's view of universal sinfulness.

He states that twice in this passage (vs. 20 to 24), and it underlies his view of the purpose of law. In verse 20 he asserts that 'by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified,' and in verses 23 and 24 he advances from that negative statement to the positive assertion that all have sinned. The impossibility of justification by the works of the law may be shown from two considerations: one, that, as a matter of fact, no flesh has ever done them all with absolute completeness and purity; and, second, that, even if they had ever been so done, they would not have availed to secure acquittal at a tribunal where motive counts for more than deed. The former is the main point with Paul.

In verse 23 the same fact of universal experience is contemplated as both positive sin and negative falling short of the 'glory' (which here seems to mean, as in John v. 44, xii. 43, approbation from God). 'There is no distinction,' but all varieties of condition, character, attainment, are alike in this, that the fatal taint is upon them all. 'We have, all of us, one human heart.' We are alike in physical necessities, in primal instincts, and, most tragically of all, in the common experience of sinfulness.

Paul does not mean to bring all varieties of character down to one dead level, but he does mean to assert that none is free from the taint. A man need only be honest in self-examination to endorse the statement, so far as he himself is concerned. The Gospel would be better understood if the fact of universal sinfulness were more deeply felt. Its superiority to all schemes for making everybody happy by rearrangements of property, or increase of culture, would be seen through; and the only cure for human misery would be discerned to be what cures universal sinfulness.

III. So we have next Paul's view of the remedy for man's sin. That is stated in general terms in verses 21, 22. Into a world of sinful men comes streaming the light of a 'righteousness of God.' That expression is here used to mean a moral state of conformity with God's will, imparted by God. The great, joyful message, which Paul felt himself sent to proclaim, is that the true way to reach the state of conformity which law requires, and which the unsophisticated, universal conscience acknowledges not to have been reached, is the way of faith.

The message is so familiar to us that we may easily fail to realise its essential greatness and wonderfulness when first proclaimed. That God should give righteousness, that it should be 'of God,' not only as coming from Him, but as, in some real way, being kindred with His own perfection; that it should be brought to men by Jesus Christ, as ancient legends told that a beneficent Titan brought from heaven, in a hollow cane, the gift of fire; and that it should become ours by the simple process of trusting in Jesus Christ, are truths which custom has largely robbed of their wonderfulness. Let us meditate more on them till they regain, by our own experience of their power, some of the celestial light which belongs to them.

Observe that in verse 22 the universality of the redemption which is in Christ is deduced from the universality of sin. The remedy must reach as far as the disease. If there is no difference in regard to sin, there can be none in regard to the sweep of redemption. The doleful universality of the covering spread over all nations, has corresponding to it the blessed universality of the light which is sent forth to flood them all. Sin's empire cannot stretch farther than Christ's kingdom.

IV. Paul's view of what makes the Gospel the remedy.

In verses 21 and 22 it was stated generally that Christ was the channel. and faith the condition, of righteousness. The personal object of faith was declared, but not the special thing in Christ which was to be trusted in. That is fully set forth in verses 24-26. We cannot attempt to discuss the great words in these verses, each of which would want a volume. But we may note that 'justified' here means to be accounted or declared righteous, as a judicial act; and that justification is traced in its ultimate source to God's 'grace,'—His own loving disposition—which bends to unworthy and lowly creatures, and is regarded as having for the medium of its bestowal the 'redemption' that is in Christ Jesus. That is the channel through which grace comes from God.

'Redemption' implies captivity, liberation, and a price paid. The metaphor of slaves set free by ransom is exchanged in verse 25 for a sacrificial reference. A propitiatory sacrifice averts punishment from the offerer. The death of the victim procures the life of the worshipper. So, a propitiatory or atoning sacrifice is offered by Christ's blood, or death. That sacrifice is the ransom-price through which our captivity is ended, and our liberty assured. As His redemption is the channel 'through' which God's grace comes to men, so faith is the condition 'through' which (ver. 25) we make that grace ours.

Note, then, that Paul does not merely point to Jesus

Christ as Saviour, but to His death as the saving power. We are to have faith in Jesus Christ (ver. 22). But that is not a complete statement. It must be faith in His propitiation, if it is to bring us into living contact with His redemption. A gospel which says much of Christ, but little of His Cross, or which dilates on the beauty of His life, but stammers when it begins to speak of the sacrifice in His death, is not Paul's Gospel, and it will have little power to deal with the universal sickness of sin.

The last verses of the passage set forth another purpose attained by Christ's sacrifice; namely, the vindication of God's righteousness in forbearing to inflict punishment on sins committed before the advent of Jesus. That Cross rayed out its power in all directions—to the heights of the heavens; to the depths of Hades (Col. i. 20); to the ages that were to come, and to those that were past. The suspension of punishment through all generations, from the beginning till that day when the Cross was reared on Calvary, was due to that Cross having been present to the divine mind from the beginning. 'The judge is condemned when the guilty is acquitted,' or left unpunished. There would be a blot on God's government, not because it was so severe, but because it was so forbearing, unless His justice was vindicated, and the fatal consequences of sin shown in the sacrifice of Christ. God could not have shown Himself just, in view either of age-long forbearance, or of now justifying the sinner, unless the Cross had shown that He was not immorally indulgent toward sin.

NO DIFFERENCE

'There is no difference.'—ROMANS iii. 22.

THE things in which all men are alike are far more important than those in which they differ. The diversities are superficial, the identities are deep as life. Physical processes and wants are the same for everybody. All men, be they kings or beggars, civilised or savage, rich or poor, wise or foolish, cultured or illiterate, breathe the same breath, hunger and thirst, eat and drink, sleep, are smitten by the same diseases, and die at last the same death. We have all of us one human heart. Tears and grief, gladness and smiles, move us all. Hope, fear, love, play the same music upon all heart-strings. The same great law of duty over-arches every man, and the same heaven of God bends above him.

Religion has to do with the deep-seated identities and not with the superficial differences. And though there have been many aristocratic religions in the world, it is the great glory of Christianity that it goes straight to the central similarities, and brushes aside, as of altogether secondary importance, all the subordinate diversities, grappling with the great facts which are common to humanity, and with the large hopes which all may inherit.

Paul here, in his grand way, triumphs and rises above all these small differences between man and man, more pure or less pure, Jew or Gentile, wise or foolish, and avers that, in regard of the deepest and most important things, 'there is no difference,' and so his Gospel is a Gospel for the world, because it deals with all men on the same level. Now I wish to work out this great glory and characteristic of the Gospel system in a few remarks, and to point out to you the more important of these things in which all men, be they what or who they may, stand in one category and have identical experiences and interests.

I. First, there is no difference in the fact of sin.

Now let us understand that the Gospel does not assert that there is no difference in the degrees of sin. Christianity does not teach, howsoever some of its apostles may seem to have taught, or unconsciously lent themselves to representations which imply the view that there was no difference between a man who 'did by nature the things contained in the law,' as Paul says, and the man who set himself to violate law. There is no such monstrous teaching in the New Testament as that all blacks are the same shade, all sin of the same gravity, no such teaching as that a man that tries according to his light to do what is right stands on exactly the same level as the man who flouts all such obligations, and has driven the chariots of his lusts and passions through every law that may stand in his way.

But even whilst we have to insist upon that, that the teaching of my text is not of an absolute identity of criminality, but only an universal participation in criminality, do not let us forget that, if you take the two extremes, and suppose it possible that there were a best man in all the world, and a worst man in all the world, the difference between these two is not perhaps so great as at first sight it looks. For we have to remember that motives make actions, and that you cannot judge of these by considering those, that 'as a man thinketh in his heart,' and not as a man does with his hands, 'so is he.' We have to remember, also, that there may be lives, sedulously and immaculately respectable and pure, which are white rather with the unwholesome leprosy of disease than with the wholesome purity of health.

In Queen Elizabeth's time, the way in which they cleaned the hall of a castle, the floor of which might be covered with remnants of food and all manner of abominations, was to strew another layer of rushes over the top of the filth, and then they thought themselves quite neat and respectable. And that is what a great many of you do, cover the filth well up with a sweet smelling layer of conventional proprieties, and think yourselves clean, and the pinks of perfection. God forbid that I should say one word that would seem to cast any kind of slur upon the effort that any man makes to do what he knows to be right, but this I proclaim, or rather my text proclaims for me, that, giving full weight and value to all that, and admitting the existence of variations in degree, the identity is deeper than the diversity; and there is 'not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not.'

Oh, dear friends! it is not a question of degree, but of direction; not how far the ship has gone on her voyage, but how she heads. Good and evil are the same in essence, whatever be their intensity and whatever be their magnitude. Arsenic is arsenic, whether you have a ton of it or a grain; and a very small dose will be enough to poison. The Gospel starts with the assertion that there is no difference in the fact of sin. The assertion is abundantly confirmed. Does not conscience assent? We all admit 'faults,' do we not? We all acknowledge 'imperfections.' It is that little word 'sin' which seems to bring in another order of considerations, and to command the assent of conscience less readily. But sin is nothing except fault considered in reference to God's law. Bring the notion of God into the life, and 'faults' and 'slips' and 'weaknesses,' and all the other names by which we try to smooth down the ugliness of the ugly thing, start up at once into their tone, magnitude, and importance, and stand avowed as *sins*.

Well now, if there be, therefore, this universal consciousness of imperfection, and if that consciousness of imperfection has only need to be brought into contact with God, as it were, to flame thus, let me remind you, too, that this fact of universal sinfulness puts us all in one class, no matter what may be the superficial difference. Shakespeare and the Australian savage, the biggest brain and the smallest, the loftiest and the lowest of us, the purest and the foulest of us, we all come into the same order. It is a question of classification. 'The Scripture hath concluded all under sin,' that is to say, has shut all men up as in a prison. You remember in the French Revolution, all manner of people were huddled indiscriminately into the same dungeon of the Paris prisons. You would find a princess and some daughter of shame from the gutters; a boor from the country and a landlord, a count, a marquis, a *savant*, a philosopher and an illiterate workman, all together in the dungeons. They kept up the distinctions of society and of class with a ghastly mockery, even to the very moment when the tumbrils came for them. And so here are we all, in some sense inclosed within the solemn cells of this great prison-house, and whether we be wise or foolish, we are prisoners, whether we have titles or not, we are prisoners. You may be a student, but you are a sinner: you may be a rich Manchester merchant, but you are a sinner; you may be a man of rank, but you are a sinner

Naaman went to Elisha and was very much offended because Elisha treated him as a leper who happened to be a nobleman. He wanted to be treated as a nobleman who happened to be a leper. And that is the way with a great many of us; we do not like to be driven into one class with all the crowd of evildoers. But, my friend, 'there is no difference.' 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.'

II. Again, there is no difference in the fact of God's love to us.

God does not love men because of what they are, therefore He does not cease to love them because of what they are. His love to the sons of men is not drawn out by their goodness, their morality, their obedience, but it wells up from the depths of His own heart, because 'it is His nature and property,' and if I may so say, He cannot help loving. You do not need to pump up that great affection by any machinery of obedience and of merits; it rises like the water in an Artesian well, of its own impulse, with ebullient power from the central heat, and spreads its great streams everywhere. And therefore, though our sin may awfully disturb our relations with God, and may hurt and harm us in a hundred ways, there is one thing it cannot do, it cannot stop Him from loving us. It cannot dam back His great love, which flows out for ever towards all His creatures, and laves them all in its gentle, strong flood, from which nothing can draw them away. 'In Him we live, and move, and have our being,' and to live in Him, whatever else it may mean—and it means a great deal more—is most certainly to live in His love. A man can as soon pass out of the atmosphere in which he breathes as he can pass out of the love of God. We can no more travel beyond that great over-arching firmament of everlasting love which spans all the universe than a star set in the blue heavens can transcend the liquid arch and get beyond its range. 'There is no difference' in the fact that all men, unthankful and evil as they are, are grasped and held in the love of God.

But there *is* a difference. Sin cannot dam God's love back, but sin has a terrible power in reference to the love of God. Two things it can do. It can make us incapable of receiving the highest blessings of that love. There are many mercies which God pours 'upon the unthankful and the evil.' These are His least gifts; His highest and best cannot be given to the unthankful and the evil. They would if they could, but they cannot, because they cannot be received by them. You can shut the shutters against the light; you can close the vase against the stream. You cannot prevent its shining, you cannot prevent its flowing, but you can prevent yourself from receiving its loftiest and best blessings.

And another awful power that my sin has in reference to God's love is, that it can modify the form which God's love takes in its dealings with me. We may force Him to do 'His work,' 'His strange work,' as Isaiah calls it, and to punish when He would fain only succour and comfort and bless. Just as a fog in the sky does not touch the sun, but turns it to our eyes into a fiery ball, red and lurid, so the mist of my sin coming between me and God, may, to my apprehension and to my capacity of reception, solemnly make different that great love of His. But yet there is no difference in the fact of God's love to us.

III. Thirdly, there is no difference in the purpose and power of Christ's Cross for us all.

'He died for all.' The area over which the purpose and the power of Christ's death extend is precisely conterminous with the area over which the power of sin extends. It cannot be—blessed be God!—that the raven Sin shall fly further than the dove with the olive branch in its mouth. It cannot be that the disease shall go wider than the cure. And so, dear friends, I have to come to you now with this message. No matter what a man is, how far he has gone, how sinful he has been, how long he has stayed away from the sweetness and grace of that great sacrifice on the Cross, that death was for him. The power of Christ's sacrifice makes possible the forgiveness of all the sins of all the world, past, present, and to come. The worth of that sacrifice, which was made by the willing surrender of the Incarnate Son of God to the death of the Cross, is sufficient for the ransom price of all the sins of all men.

Nor is it only the power of the Cross which is all embracing, but its purpose also. In the very hour of Christ's death, there stood, clear and distinct, before His divine omniscience, each man, woman, and child of the race. And for them all, grasping them all in the tenderness of His sympathy and in the clearness of His knowledge, in the design of His sufferings for them all, He died, so that every human being may lay his hand on the head of the sacrifice, and *know* 'his guilt was there,' and may say, with as triumphant and appropriating faith as Paul did, 'He loved *me*,' and in that hour of agony and love 'gave Himself for *me*.'

To go back to a metaphor already employed, the prisoners are gathered together in the prison, not that they may be slain, but 'God hath included them all,' shut them all up, 'that He might have mercy upon all.' And so, as it was in the days of Christ's life upon earth, so is it now, and so will it be for ever. All the crowd may come to Him, and whosoever comes 'is made whole of whatsoever disease he had.' There are no incurables nor outcasts. 'There is no difference.'

IV. Lastly, there is no difference in the way which we must take for salvation.

The only thing that unites men to Jesus Christ is faith. You must trust Him, you must trust the power of His sacrifice, you must trust the might of His living love. You must trust Him with a trust which is self-distrust. You must trust Him out and out. The people with whom Paul is fighting, in this chapter, were quite willing to admit that faith was the thing that made Christians, but they wanted to tack on something besides. They wanted to tack on the rites of Judaism and obedience to the moral law. And ever since men have been going on in that erroneous rut. Sometimes it has been that people have sought to add a little of their own morality; sometimes to add ceremonies and sacraments. Sometimes it has been one thing and sometimes it has been another; but there are not two ways to the Cross of Christ, and to the salvation which He gives. There is only one road, and all sorts of men have to come by it. You cannot lean half upon Christ and half upon yourselves, like the timid cripple that is not quite sure of the support of the friendly arm. You cannot eke out the robe with which He will clothe you with a little bit of stuff of your own weaving. It is an insult to a host to offer to pay for entertainment. The Gospel feast that Christ provides is not a social meal to which every guest brings a dish. Our part is simple reception, we have to bring empty hands if we would receive the blessing.

We must put away superficial differences. The Gospel is for the world, therefore the act by which we receive it must be one which all men can perform, not one which only some can do. Not wisdom, nor righteousness, but faith joins us to Christ. And, therefore, people who fancy themselves wise or righteous are offended that 'special terms' are not made with them. They would prefer to have a private portion for themselves. It grates against the pride of the aristocratic class, whether it be aristocratic by culture—and that is the most aristocratic of all—or by position, or anything else—it grates against their pride to be told: 'You have to go in by that same door that the beggar is going in at'; and 'there is no difference.' Therefore, the very width of the doorway, that is wide enough for all the world, gets to be thought narrowness, and becomes a hindrance to our entering. As Naaman's servant put a common-sense question to him, so may I to you. 'If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?' Ay! that you would! 'How much more when He says "Wash and be clean!"' There is only one way of getting dirt off, and that is by water. There is only one way of getting sin off, and that is by the blood of Jesus Christ. There is only one way of having that blood applied to your heart, and that is trusting Him. 'The common salvation' becomes ours when we exercise 'the common faith.' 'There is no difference' in our sins. Thank God! 'there is no difference' in the fact that He grasps us with His love. There is no difference in the fact that Jesus Christ has died for us all. Let there be no difference in our faith, or there will be a difference, deep as the difference between Heaven and Hell; the difference between them that believe and them that believe not, which will darken and widen into the difference between them that are saved and them that perish.

'LET US HAVE PEACE

'Let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'
ROMANS v. 1. (R.V.).

IN the rendering of the Revised Version, 'Let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,' the alteration is very slight, being that of one letter in one word, the substitution of a long 'o' for a short one. The majority of manuscripts of authority read 'let us have,' making the clause an exhortation and not a statement. I suppose the reason why, in some inferior MSS., the statement takes the place of the exhortation is because it was felt to be somewhat of a difficulty to understand the Apostle's course of thought. But I shall hope to show you that the true understanding of the context, as well as of the words I have taken for my text, requires the exhortation and not the affirmation.

One more remark of an introductory character: is it not very beautiful to see how the Apostle here identifies himself, in all humility, with the Christians whom he is addressing, and feels that he, Apostle as he is, has the same need for the same counsel and stimulus that the weakest of those to whom he is writing have? It would have been so easy for him to isolate himself, and say, 'Now you have peace with God; see that you keep it.' But he puts himself into the same class as those whom he is exhorting, and that is what all of us have to do who would give advice that will be worth anything or of any effect. He does not stand upon a little molehill of superiority, and look down upon the Roman Christians, and imply that they have needs that he has not, but he exhorts himself too, saying, 'Let all of us who have obtained like precious faith, which is alike in an Apostle and in the humblest believer, have peace with God.'

Now a word, first, about the meaning of this somewhat singular exhortation.

There is a theory of man and his relation to God underlying it, which is very unfashionable at present, but which corresponds to the deepest things in human nature, and the deepest mysteries in human history, and that is, that something has come in to produce the totally unnatural and monstrous fact that between God and man there is not amity or harmony. Men, on their side, are alienated, because their wills are rebellious and their aims diverse from God's purpose concerning them. And—although it is an awful thing to have to say, and one from which the sentimentalism of much modern Christianity weakly recoils—on God's side, too, the relation has been disturbed, and 'we are by nature the children of wrath, even as others'; not of a wrath which is unloving, not of a wrath which is impetuous and passionate, not of a wrath which seeks the hurt of its objects, but of a wrath which is the necessary antagonism and recoil of pure love from such creatures as we have made ourselves to be. To speak as if the New Testament taught that 'reconciliation' was lop-sided—which would be a contradiction in terms, for reconciliation needs two to make it—to talk as if the New Testament taught that reconciliation was only man's putting away his false relation to God, is, as I humbly think, to be blind to its plainest teaching. So, there being this antagonism and separation between God and man, the Gospel comes to deal with it, and proclaims that Jesus Christ has abolished the enmity, and by His death on the Cross has become our peace; and that we, by faith in that Christ, and grasping in faith His death, pass from out of the condition of hostility into the condition of reconciliation.

With this by way of basis, let us come back to my text. It sounds strange; 'Therefore, being justified by faith, let us have peace.' 'Well,' you will say, 'but is not all that you have been saying just this, that to be justified by faith, to be declared righteous by reason of faith in Him who makes us righteous, is to have peace with God? Is not your exhortation an entirely superfluous one?' No doubt that is what the old scribe thought who originated the reading which has crept into our Authorised Version. The two things do seem to be entirely parallel. To be justified by faith is a certain process, to have peace with God is the inseparable and simultaneous result of that process itself. But that is going rather too fast. 'Being justified by faith let us have peace with God,' really is just this—see that you abide where you are; keep what you have. The exhortation is not to attain peace, but retain it. 'Hold fast that thou hast; let no man take thy crown.' 'Being justified by faith' cling to your treasure and let nothing rob you of it—'let us have peace with God.'

Now a word, in the next place, as to the necessity and importance of this exhortation.

There underlies it, this solemn thought, which Christian people, and especially some types of Christian doctrine, do need to have hammered into them over and over again, that we hold the blessed life itself, and all its blessings, only on condition of our own co-operation in keeping them; and that just as physical life dies, unless by reception of food we nourish and continue it, so a man that is in this condition of being justified by faith, and having peace with God, needs, in order to the permanence of that condition, to give his utmost effort and diligence. It will all go if he do not. All the old state will come back again if we are slothful and negligent. We cannot keep the treasure unless we guard it. And just because we have it, we need to put all our mind, the earnestness of our will, and the concentration of our efforts, into the specific work of retaining it.

For, consider how manifold and strong are the forces which are always working against our continual possession of this justification by faith, and consequent peace with God. There are all the ordinary cares and duties and avocations and fortunes of our daily life, which, indeed, may be so hallowed in their motives and in their activities, as that they may be turned into helps instead of hindrances, but which require a great deal of diligence and effort in order that they should not work like grains of dust that come between the parts of some nicely-fitting engine, and so cause friction and disaster. There are all the daily tasks that tempt us to forget the things that we only know by faith, and to be absorbed in the things that we can touch and taste and handle. If a man is upon an inclined plane, unless he is straining his muscles to go upwards, gravitation will make short work of him, and bring him down. And unless Christian men grip hard and continually that sense of having fellowship and peace with God, as sure as they are living they will lose the clearness of that consciousness, and the calm that comes from it. For we cannot go into the world and do the work that is laid upon us all without there being possible hostility to the Christian life in everything that we meet. Thank God there is possible help, too, and whether our daily calling is an enemy or a friend to our religion depends upon the earnestness and continuousness of our own efforts. But there is a worse force than these external distractions working to draw us away, one that we carry within, in our own vacillating wills and wayward hearts and treacherous affections and passions that usually lie dormant, but wake up sometimes at the most inopportune periods. Unless we keep a very tight hand upon ourselves, certainly these will rob us of this consciousness of being justified by faith which brings with it peace with God that passes understanding.

In the Isle of Wight massive cliffs rise hundreds of feet above the sea, and seem as if they were as solid as the framework of the earth itself. But they rest upon a sharply inclined plane of clay, and the moisture trickles through the rifts in the majestic cliffs above, and gets down to that slippery substance and makes it like the greased ways down which they launch a ship; and away goes the cliff one day, with its hundreds of feet of buttresses that have fronted the tempest for centuries, and it lies toppled in hideous ruin on the beach below. We have all a layer of 'blue slipper' in ourselves, and unless we take care that no storm-water finds its way down through the chinks in the rocks above they will slide into awful ruin. 'Being justified, let us have peace with God,' and remember that the exhortation is enforced not only by a consideration of the many strong forces which tend to deprive us of this peace, but also by a consideration of the hideous disaster that comes upon a man's whole nature if he loses peace with God. For there is no peace with ourselves, and there is no peace with man, and there is no peace in face of the warfare of life and the calamities that are certainly before us all, unless, in the deepest sanctuary of our being, there is the peace of God because in our consciences there is peace with God. If I desire to be at rest—and there is no blessedness but rest—if I desire to know the sovereign joy of tranquillity, undisturbed by my own stormy passions or by any human enmity, and to have even the 'beasts of the field at peace with' me, and all things my helpers and allies, there is but one way to realise the desire, and that is the retention of peace with God that comes with being justified by faith.

Lastly, a word or two as to the ways by which this exhortation can be carried into effect.

I have tried to explain how the peace of which my text speaks comes originally through Christ's work laid hold of by my faith, and now I would say only three things.

Retain the peace by the exercise of that same faith which at first brought it. Next, retain it by union with that same Lord from whom you at first received it. Very significantly, in the immediate context, we have the Apostle drawing a broad distinction between the benefits which we have received from Christ's death, and those which we shall receive through His life. And that is the best commentary on the words of my text. 'If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.' So let our faith grasp firmly the great twin facts of the Christ who died that He might abolish the enmity, and bring us peace; and of the Christ who lives in order that

He may pour into our hearts more and more of His own life, and so make us more and more in His own image. And the last word that I would say, in addition to these two plain, practical precepts is, let your conduct be such as will not disturb your peace with God. For if a man lets his own will rise up in rebellion against God's, whether that divine will command duty or impose suffering, away goes all his peace. There is no possibility of the tranquil sense of union and communion with my Father in heaven lasting when I am in rebellion against Him. The smallest sin destroys, for the time being, our sense of forgiveness and our peace with God. The blue surface of the lake, mirroring in its unmoved tranquillity the sky and the bright sun, or the solemn stars, loses all that reflected heaven in its heart when a cat's paw of wind ruffles its surface. If we would keep our hearts as mirrors, in their peace, of the peace in the heavens that shine down on them, we must fence them from the winds of evil passions and rebellious wills. 'Oh! that thou wouldest hearken unto Me, then had thy peace been like a river.'

ACCESS INTO GRACE

'By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.'
ROMANS v. 2.

I MAY be allowed to begin with a word or two of explanation of the terms of this passage. Note then, especially, that *also* which sends us back to the previous clause, and tells us that our text adds something to what was spoken of there. What was spoken of there? 'The peace of God' which comes to a man by Jesus

Christ through faith, the removal of enmity, and the declaration of righteousness. But that peace with God, which is the beginning of everything in the Christian view, is only the beginning, and there is much to follow. While, then, there is a progress clearly marked in the words of our text, and 'access into this grace wherein we stand' is something more than, and after, the 'peace with God,' mark next the similarity of the text and the preceding verse. The two great truths in the latter, Christ's mediation or intervention, and our faith as the condition by which we receive the blessings which are brought to us in and through Him, are both repeated, with no unmeaning tautology, but with profound significance in our text—'By whom also we have access'—as well as—'the peace of God'—'access *by faith* into this grace.' So then, for the initial blessing, and for all the subsequent blessings of the Christian life, the way is the same. The medium and channel is one, and the act by which we avail ourselves of the blessings coming through that one medium is the same. Now the language of my text, with its talking about access, faith, and grace, sounds to a great many of us, I am afraid, very hard and remote and technical. And there are not wanting people who tell us that all that terminology in the New Testament is like a dying brand in the fire, where the little kernel of glowing heat is getting covered thicker and thicker with grey ashes. Yes; but if you blow the ashes off, the fire is there all the same. Let us try if we can blow the ashes off.

This text seems to me in its archaic phraseology, only to need to be pondered in order to flash up into wonderful beauty. It carries in it a magnificent ideal of the Christian life, in three things: the Christian place, 'access into grace'; the Christian attitude, 'wherein we stand'; and the Christian means of realising that ideal, 'through Christ' and 'by faith.' Now let us look at these three points.

I. The Christian Place.

There is clearly a metaphor here, both in the word 'access' and in that other one 'stand.' 'The grace' is supposed as some ample space into which a man is led, and where he can continue, stand, and expatiate. Or, we may say, it is regarded as a palace or treasure-house into which we can enter. Now, if we take that great New Testament word 'grace,' and ponder its meanings, we find that they run something in this fashion. The central thought, grand and marvellous, which is enshrined in it, and which often is buried for careless ears, is that of the active love of God poured out upon inferiors who deserve something very different. Then there follows a second meaning, which covers a great part of the ground of the use of the phrase in the New Testament, and that is the communication of that love to men, the specific and individualised gifts which come out of that great reservoir of patient, pardoning, condescending, and bestowing love. Then there may be taken into view a meaning which is less prominent in Scripture but not absent, namely, the resulting beauty of character. A gracious soul ought to be, and is, a graceful soul; a supreme loveliness is imparted to human nature by the communication to it of the gifts which are the results of the undeserved, free, and infinite love of God.

Now if we take all these three thoughts as blended together in the grand metaphor of the Apostle, of the ample space into which the Christian man passes, we get such lessons as this. A Christian life may, and therefore should, be suffused with a continual consciousness of the love of God. That would change everything in it. Here is some great sweep of rolling country, perhaps a Highland moor: the little tarns on it are grey and cold, the vegetation is gloomy and dark, dreariness is over all the scene, because there is a great pall of cloud drawn beneath the blue. But the sun pierces with his lances through the grey, and crumples up the mists, and sends them flying beneath the horizon. Then what a change in the landscape! All the tarns that looked black and wicked are now infantile in their innocent blue and sunny gladness, and every dimple in the heights shows, and all the heather burns with the sunshine that falls upon it. So my lonely doleful life, if that light from God, the beam of His love, shines down upon it, rises into nobility, and flashes into beauty, and is calm and fair and great, as nothing else can make it. You may dwell in love by dwelling in God, and then your lives will be fair. You have access into the grace; see that you go there. They tell us that nightingales sing by the wayside by preference, and we may have in our lives, singing a quiet tune, the continual thought of the love of God, even whilst life's highway is dusty and rough, and our feet are often weary in treading it. A Christian life may be, and therefore should be, suffused with the sense of the abiding love of God.

Take the other meaning of the word, the secondary and derived meaning, the communication of that love to us, and that leads us to say that a Christian life may, and therefore should, be enriched with continual gifts from God's fullness. I said that the Apostle was using a metaphor here, regarding the grace as being an ample space into which a man was admitted, or we may say that he is thinking of it as a great treasure-house. We have the right of entrance there, where on every side, as it were, lie ingots of uncoined gold, and masses of treasure, and we may have just as much or as little as we choose. It is entirely in our own determination how much of the wealth of God we shall possess. We have access to the treasure-house; and this permit is put into our hands: 'Be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' The size of the sack that the man brings, in the old story, determined the amount of wealth that he carried away. Some of you bring very tiny baskets and expect little and desire little; you get no more than you desired and expected.

That wealth, the fullness of God, takes the shape of, as well as is determined in its measure by the magnitude of, the vessel into which it is put. It is multiform, and we get whatever we desire, and whatever either our characters or our circumstances require. The one gift assumes all forms, just as water poured into a vase takes the shape of the vase into which it is poured. The same gift unfolds itself in an infinite variety of manners, according to the needs of the man to whom it is given; just as the writer's pen, the carpenter's hammer, the farmer's ploughshare, are all made out of the same metal. So God's grace comes to you in a different shape from that in which it comes to me, according to our different callings and needs, as fixed by our circumstances, our duties, our sorrows, our temptations.

So, brethren, how shameful it is that, having the possibility of so much, we should have the actuality of so little. There is an old story about one of our generals in India long ago, who, when he came home was accused of rapacity because he had brought away so much treasure from the Rajahs whom he had conquered, and his answer to the charge was, 'I was surprised at my own moderation.' Ah! there are a great many Christian people who ought to be ashamed of their moderation. They have gone into the treasure-house; stacks of jewels, jars of gold on all sides of them—and they have been content to come away with some one poor little coin, when they might have been 'rich beyond the dreams of avarice.' Brethren, you have 'access' to the fullness of God. Whose fault is it if you are empty?

Then, further, I said there was another meaning in these great words. The love which may suffuse our lives, the gifts, the consequence of that love, which may enrich our lives, should, and in the measure in which they are received will, adorn and make beautiful our lives. For 'grace' means loveliness as well as goodness, and the God who is the fountain of it all is the fountain of 'whatsoever things are fair,' as well as of whatsoever things are good. That suggests two considerations on which I have no time to dwell. One is that the highest beauty is goodness, and unless the art of a nation learns that, its art will become filthy and a minister of sin. They talk about 'Art for Art's sake.' Would that all these poets and painters who are trying to find beauty in corruption—and there is a phosphorescent glimmer in rotting wood, and a prismatic colouring on the scum of a stagnant pond—would that all those men who are seeking to find beauty apart from goodness, and so are turning a divine instinct into a servant of evil, would learn that the true gracefulness comes from the grace which is the fullness of God given unto men.

But there is another lesson, and that is that Christian people who say that they have their lives irradiated by the love of God, and who profess to be receiving gifts from His full hand, are bound to take care that their goodness is not 'harsh and crabbed,' as not only 'dull fools suppose' it to be, but as it sometimes is, but is musical and fair. You are bound to make your goodness attractive, and to show that the things that are 'of good report' are likewise the 'things that are lovely.'

II. And so, now, turn to the second point here, viz. the Christian attitude.

'The grace wherein ye *stand*'; that word is very emphatic here, and does not merely mean 'continue,' but it suggests what I have put into that phrase, the Christian attitude.

Two things are implied. One is that a life thus suffused by the love, and enriched by the gifts, and adorned by the loveliness that come from God, will be stable and steadfast. Resistance and stability are implied in the words. One very important item in determining a man's power of resistance, and of standing firm against whatever assaults may be hurled against him, is the sort of footing that he has. If you stand on slippery mud, or on the ice of a glacier, you will find it hard to stand firm; but if you plant your foot on the grace of God, then you will be able to 'withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.' And how does a man plant his foot on the grace of God? simply by trusting in God, and not in himself. So that the secret of all steadfastness of life, and of all successful resistance to the whirling onrush of temptations and of difficulties, is to set your foot upon that rock, and then your 'goings' will be established.

Jesus Christ brings to us, in the gift of life in Him, stability which will check the vacillations of our own hearts. We go up and down, we yield when pressure is brought to bear against us, we are carried off our feet often by the sudden swirl of the stream, and the fitful blast of the wind. But His grace comes in, and will make us able to stand against all assaults. Our poor natures, necessarily changeable, and sinfully vacillating and weak, will be uniform, in the measure in which the grace of God comes into our hearts. Just as in these so-called petrifying wells, they take a bit of cloth, a bird's nest, a billet of wood, and plunge it into the water, and the mineral held in solution there infiltrates into the substance of the thing plunged in, and makes it firm and inflexible: so let us plunge our poor, changeful, vacillating resolutions, our wayward, wandering hearts, our passions, so easily excited by temptation, into that great fountain, and there will filter into our flexibility what will make it firm, and into our changefulness what will give in us some faint copy of the divine immutability, and we shall stand fast in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Further, in regard to this attitude, which is the result of the possession of grace, we may say that it indicates not only stability and steadfastness, but erectness, as in opposition to crouching or bowing. A man's independence is guaranteed by his dependence upon, and his possession of, that communicated grace of God. And so you have the fact that the phase of the Christian teaching which has laid most stress on the decrees and sovereign will of God, on divine grace in fact, and too little upon the human side—the phase which is roughly described as Calvinism—has underlain the liberties of Europe, and has stiffened men into the rejection of all priestly and civic domination. 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,' and if a man has in his heart the grace of God, then he stands erect as a man. 'Ye are bought with a price; be ye not the servants of men.' The Christian democracy, the Christian rejection of all sacerdotal and other domination, flows from the access of each individual Christian to the fountain of all wisdom, the only source of law and command, the inspirer of all strength, the giver of all grace. By faith ye stand. 'Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free.'

III. Lastly, and only a word; we have here the Christian way of entrance into grace.

I have already remarked on the emphasis with which, both in my text and in the preceding clause, there are laid down the two conditions of possessing this grace, or the peace which precedes it: 'By Christ—through faith.' Notice, too, that Jesus Christ gives us 'access.' Now that expression is but an imperfect rendering of the original. If it were not for its trivial associations, one might read instead of 'access,' introduction, 'by whom we have introduction into this grace wherein we stand.' The thought is that Jesus Christ secures us entry into this ample space, this treasure-house, as some court officer might take by the the hand a poor rustic, standing on the threshold of the palace, and lead him through all the glittering series of unfamiliar splendour, and present him at last in the central ring around the king. The reality that underlies the metaphor is plain. We sinners can never pass into that central glory, nor ever possess those gifts of grace, unless the barrier that stands between us and God, between us and His highest gifts of love, is swept away

I recall an old legend where two knights are represented as seeking to enter a palace, where there is a mysterious fire burning in the middle of the portal. One of them tries to pass through, and recoils scorched; but when the other essays an entrance the fierce fire sinks, and the path is cleared. Jesus Christ has died, and I say it with all reverence, as His blood touches the fire it flickers down and the way is opened 'into the holiest of all, whither the Forerunner is for us entered.' He both brings the grace and makes it possible that we should go in where the grace is.

But Jesus Christ's work is nothing to you unless your personal faith comes in, and so that is pointed to in the second of the clauses here: '*By faith* we have access.' That is no arbitrary appointment. It lies in the very nature of the gift and of the recipient. How can God give access into that grace to a man who shrinks from being near Him; who does not want 'access,' and who could not use the grace if he had it? How can God bestow inward and spiritual gifts upon any man who closes his heart against them, and will not have them? My faith is the condition; Christ is the Giver. If I ally myself to Him by my faith, He gives to me. If I do not, with all the will to do it, He cannot bestow His best gifts any more than a man who stretches out his hand to another sinking in the flood can lift him out, and set him on the safe shore, if the drowning man's hand is not stretched out to grasp the rescuer's outstretched hand.

Brethren, God is infinitely willing to give the choicest gifts of His love to us all, to gladden, to enrich, to adorn, to make stable and erect. But He cannot give them unless you will trust Him. 'It pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell.'

That alabaster box is brought to earth. It was broken on the Cross that 'the house' might be 'filled with the odour of the ointment.' Our faith is the only condition; it is only the condition, but it is the indispensable condition, of our being anointed with that fragrant anointing. He, and He only, can give us the fullness of God.

THE SOURCES OF HOPE

'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4. And patience, experience; and experience, hope.'—ROMANS v. 2-4.

WE have seen in a previous sermon that the Apostle in the foregoing context is sketching a grand outline of the ideal Christian life, as all rooted in 'being justified by faith,' and flowering into 'peace with God,' 'access into grace,' and a firm stand against all antagonists and would-be masters. In our text he advances to complete the outline by sketching the true Christian attitude towards the future. I have ventured to take so pregnant and large a text, because there is a very striking and close connection throughout the verses, which is lost unless we take them together. Note, then, 'we rejoice in hope,' 'we glory in tribulation.' Now, it is one word in the original which is diversely rendered in these two clauses by 'rejoice' and 'glory.' The latter is a better rendering than the former, because the original expression designates not only the emotion of joy, but the expression of it, especially in words. So it is frequently rendered in the New Testament by the word 'boast,' which, of course, has unpleasant associations, which scarcely fit it for use here. So then you see Paul regards it as possible for, and more than possibly characteristic of, a Christian, that the very same emotion should be excited by that great bright future hope, and by the blackness of present sorrow. That is strong meat; and so he goes on to explain how he thinks it can and must be so, and points out that trouble, through a series of results, arrives at last at this, that if it is rightly borne, it flashes up into greater brightness the hope which has grasped the glory of God. So then we have here, not only a wonderful designation of the object around which Christian hope twines its tendrils, but of the double source from which that hope may come, and of the one emotion with which Christian people should front the darkness of the present and the brightness of the future. Ah! how different our lives would be if that ideal of a steadfast hope and an untroubled joy were realised by each of us. It may be. It should be. So I ask you to look at these three points which I have suggested.

I. That wonderful designation of the one object of Christian hope which should fill, with an uncoruscating and unflickering light, all that dark future.

'We rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' Now, I suppose I need not remind you that that phrase 'the glory of God' is, in the Old Testament, used especially to mean the light that dwelt between the cherubim above the mercy-seat; the symbol of the divine perfections and the token of the Divine Presence. The reality of which it was a symbol is the total splendour, so to speak, of that divine nature, as it rays itself out into all the universe. And, says Paul, the true hope of the Christian man is nothing less than that of that glory he shall be, in some true sense, and in an eternally growing degree, the real possessor. It is a tremendous claim, and one which leads us into deep places that I dare not venture into now, as to the resemblance between the human person and the Divine Person, notwithstanding all the differences which of course exist, and which only a presumptuous form of religion has ventured to treat as transitory or insignificant. Let me use a technical word, and say that it is no pantheistic absorption in an impersonal Light, no Nirvana of union with a vague whole, which the Apostle holds out here, but it is the closest possible union, personality being saved and individual consciousness being intensified. It is the clothing of humanity with so much of that glory as can be imparted to a finite creature. That means perfect knowledge, perfect purity, perfect love, and that means the dropping away of all weaknesses and the access of strange new powers, and that means the end of the schism between 'will' and 'ought,' and of the other schism between 'will' and 'can.' It means what this Apostle says: 'Whom He justified them He also glorified,' and what He says again, 'We all, beholding as in a glass'—or rather, perhaps, mirroring as a glass does—'the glory, are changed into the same image.'

The very heart of Christianity is that the Divine Light of which that Shekinah was but a poor and transitory symbol has 'tabernacled' amongst men in the Christ, and has from Him been communicated, and is being communicated in such measure as earthly limitations and conditions permit, and that these do point on assuredly to perfect impartation hereafter, when 'we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' The Three could walk in the furnace of fire, because there was One with them, 'like unto the Son of God.' 'Who among us shall dwell with the everlasting fire,' the fire of that divine perfection? They who have had introduction by Christ into the grace, and who will be led by Him into the glory.

Now, brethren, it seems to me to be of great importance that this, the loftiest of conceptions of that future life, should be the main aspect under which we think of it. It is well to speak of rest from toil; it is well to speak of all the negations of present unfavourable, afflictive conditions which that future presents to us. And perhaps there is none of the aspects of it which appeals to deeper feelings in ourselves, than those which say 'there shall be no night there,' 'there shall be no tears there, neither sorrow nor sighing'; 'there shall be no toil there.' But we must rise above all that, for our heaven is to live in God, and to be possessors of His glory. Do not let us dwell upon the symbols instead of the realities. Do not let us dwell only on the oppositions and contradictions to earth. Let us rather rise high above symbols, high above negations, to the positive truth, and not contented with saying 'We shall be full of blessedness; we shall be full of purity; we shall be full of knowledge,' let us rather think of that which embraces them all—we shall be full of God.

So much, then, for the one object of Christian hope. We have here—

II. The double source of that hope.

Observe that the first clause of my text comes as the last term in a sequence. It began with 'being justified by faith.' The second round of the ladder was, 'we have peace with God.' The third, 'we have access into this grace.' The fourth, 'we stand,' and then comes, 'we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' That is to say, to put it into general words, and, of course, presupposing the revelation in Jesus Christ as the basis of all, without which there is no assured hope of a future beyond the grave, then the facts of a Christian man's life are for him the best brighteners of the hope beyond. Of course, that is so. 'Justified by faith'—'peace with God'—'access into grace'; what, in the name of common-sense, can death do with these things? How can its blunted sword cut the bond that unites a soul that has had such experiences as these with the source of them all? Nothing can be more grotesque, nothing more incongruous, than to think that that subordinate and accidental fact, whose region is the physical, has anything whatever to do with this higher region of consciousness.

And, further than that, it is absolutely unthinkable to a man in the possession of these spiritual gifts, that they should ever come to a close; and the fact that in the precise degree in which we realise as our very own possession, here and now, these Christian emotions and blessings, we instinctively rise to the belief that they are 'not for an age, but for all time,' and not for all time, but for eternity, is itself, if not a proof, yet a very strong presumption, if you believe in God, that a man who thus 'feels he was not made to die' because he has grasped the Eternal, is right in so feeling. If, too, we look at the experiences themselves, they all have the stamp of incompleteness, and suggest completeness by their own incompleteness. The new moon with its ragged edge not more surely prophesies its completed silver round, than do the experiences of the Christian life here, in their greatness and in their smallness, declare that there come a time and an order of things in which what was thwarted tendency shall be accomplished result. The tender green spikelet, pushing up through the brown clods, does not more surely prophesy the waving yellow ear, nor the broad highway on which a man comes in the wilderness more surely declare that there is a village at the end of it, than do the facts of the Christian life, here and now, attest the validity of the hope of the glory of God.

And so, brethren, if you wish to brighten that great light that fills the future, see to it that your present Christianity is fuller of 'peace with God,' 'access into grace,' and the firm, erect standing which flows from these. When the springs in the mountains dry up, the river in the valley shrinks; and when they are full, it glides along level with the top of its banks. So when our Christian life in the present is richest, our Christian hope of the future will be the brighter. Look into yourselves. Is there anything there that witnesses to that great future; anything there that is obviously incipient, and destined to greater power; anything there which is like a tropical plant up here in 45 degrees of north latitude, managing to grow, but with dwarfed leaves and scanty flowers and half shrivelled and sourish fruit, and that in the cold dreams of the warm native land? Reflecting telescopes show the stars in a mirror, and the observer looks down to see the heavens. Look into yourselves, and see whether, on the polished plate within, there are any images of the stars that move around the Throne of God.

But let us turn for a moment to the second source to which the Apostle traces the Christian hope here. I must not be tempted to more than just a word of explanation, but perhaps you will tolerate that. Paul says that trouble works patience, that is to say, not only passive endurance, but brave persistence in a course, in spite of antagonisms. That is what trouble does to a man when it is rightly borne. Of course the Apostle is speaking here of its ideal operation, and not of the reality which alas! often is seen when our tribulations lash us into impatience, or paralyse our efforts. Tribulation worketh patience, 'and patience *experience*.' That is a difficult word to put into English. There underlies it the frequent thought which is familiar in Scripture, of trouble of all kinds as testing a man, whether as the refiner's fire or the winnower's fan. It tests a man, and if he bears the trouble with patient persistence, then he has passed the test and is approved. Patient perseverance thus works approval, or proof of the man's Christianity, and, still more, proof of the reality and power of the Christ whom his Christianity grasps. And so from out of that approval or proof which comes, through perseverance, from tribulation, there rises, of course, in that heart that has been tested and has stood, a calm hope that the future will be as the past, and that, having fought through six troubles, by God's help the seventh will be vanquished also, till at last troubles will end, and heaven be won.

Brethren, there is the true point of view from which to look, not only at tribulations, but at all the trials, for they too bring trials, that lie in duty and in enjoyment, and in earthly things. They are meant to work in us a conviction, by our experience of having been able to meet them aright, of the reality of our grasp of God, and of the reality and power of the God whom we grasp. If we took that point of view in regard to all the changes of this changeful life, we should not so often be bewildered and upset by the darkest of our sorrows. The shining lancets and cruel cutting instruments that the surgeon lays out on his table before he begins the operation are very dreadful. But the way to think of them is that they are there in order to remove from a man what it does him harm to keep, and what, if it is not taken away, will kill him. So life, with its troubles, great and small, is all meant for this, to make us surer of, and bring us closer to, our God, and to brace and strengthen us in our own personal character. And if it does that, then blessed be everything that produces these results, and leads us thereby to glorying in the troubles by which shines out on us a brighter hope.

So there are the two sources, you see: the one is the blessedness of the Christian life, the other the sorrows of the outward life, and both may converge upon the brightening of our Christian hope. Our rainbow is the child of the marriage of the sun and the rain. The Christian hope comes from being 'justified by faith, having peace with God . . . and access into grace,' and it comes from tribulation, which 'worketh patience,' and patience which 'worketh approval.' The one spark is struck from the hard flint by the cold steel, and the other is kindled by the sun itself, but they are both fire.

And so, lastly, we have here—

III. The one emotion with which the Christian should front all the facts, inward and outward, of his earthly life.

'We glory in the hope,' 'we glory in tribulation.' I need not dwell upon the lesson which is taught us here by the fact that the Apostle puts as one in a series of Christian characteristics this of a steadfast and all-embracing joy. I do not believe that we Christian people half enough realise how imperative a Christian duty, as well as how great a Christian privilege, it is to be glad always. You have no right to be anxious; you are wrong to be hypochondriac and depressed, and weary and melancholy. True; there are a great many occasions in our Christian life which minister sadness. True; the Christian joy looks very gloomy to a worldly eye. But there are far more occasions which, if we were right, would make joy instinctive, and which, whether we are right or not, make it obligatory upon us. I need not speak of how, if that hope were brighter than it commonly is with us, and if it were more constantly present to our minds and hearts, we should sing with gladness. I need not dwell upon that great and wonderful paradox by which the co-existence of sorrow and of joy is possible. The sorrows are on the surface; beneath there may be rest. All the winds of heaven may rave across the breast of ocean, and fret it into clouds of spume against a storm-swept sky. But deep down there is stillness, and yet not stagnation, because there is the great motion that brings life and freshness; and so, though there will be wind-vexed surfaces on our too-often agitated spirits, there ought to be deeper than these the calm setting of the whole ocean of our nature towards God Himself. It is possible, as this Apostle has it, to be 'sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.' It is possible, as his brother Apostle has it, to 'rejoice greatly, though now for a season we are in sorrow through manifold temptations.' Look back upon your lives from the point of view that your tribulation is an instrument to produce hope, and you will be able to thank God for all the way by which He has led you.

Now, brethren, the plain lesson of all this is just that we have here, in these texts, a linked chain, one end of which is wrapped around our sinful hearts, and the other is fastened to the Throne of God. You cannot drop any of the links, and you must begin at the beginning, if you are to be carried on to the end. If we are to have a joy immovable, we must have a 'steadfast hope.' If we are to have a 'steadfast hope,' we must have a present 'grace.' If we are to have a present 'grace,' and 'access' to the fullness of God, we must have 'peace with God.' If we are to have 'peace with God,' we must have the condemnation and the guilt taken away. If we are to have the condemnation and the guilt taken away, Jesus Christ must take them. If Jesus Christ is to take them away, we must have faith in Him. Then you can work it backward, and begin at your own end, and say, 'If I have faith in Jesus Christ, then every link of the chain in due succession will pass through my hand, and I shall have justifying, peace, access, the grace, erectness, hope, and exultation, and at last He will lead me by the hand into the glory for which I dare to hope, the glory which the Father gave to Him before the foundation of the world, and which He will give to me when the world has passed away in fervent heat.'

A THREEFOLD CORD

'And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.'—ROMANS v. 5.

WE have seen in former sermons that, in the previous context, the Apostle traces Christian hope to two sources: one, the series of experiences which follow 'being justified by faith,' and the other, those which follow on trouble rightly borne. Those two golden chains together hold up the precious jewel of hope.

But a chain that is to bear a weight must have a staple, or it will fall to the ground. And so Paul here turns to yet another thought, and, going behind both our inward experiences and our outward discipline, falls back on that which precedes all. After all is said and done, the love of God, eternal, self-originated, the source of all Christian experiences because of the work of Christ which originates them all, is the root fact of the universe, and the guarantee that our highest anticipations and desires are not unsubstantial visions, but morning dreams, which are proverbially sure to be fulfilled. God is love; therefore the man who trusts Him shall not be put to shame.

But you will notice that here the Apostle not only adduces the love of God as the staple, so to speak, from which these golden chains hang, but that he traces the heart's being suffused with that love to its source, and as, of course, is always the case in the order of analysis, that which was last in time comes first in statement. We begin at the surface, and go down and down and down from effect to cause, and yet again to the cause of that cause which is itself effect. We strip off, as it were, layer after layer, until we get to the living centre—hope comes from the love, the love comes from the Spirit in the heart. And so to get at the order of time and of manifestation, we must reverse the order of analysis in my text, and begin where it ends. So we have here three things—the Spirit given, the love shed abroad by that Spirit, and the hope established by that love. Now just look at them for a moment.

I. The Spirit given.

Now, the first point to notice here is that the Revised Version presents the meaning of our text more accurately than the Authorised Version, because, instead of reading 'is given,' it correctly reads 'was given.' And any of you that can consult the original will see that the form of the language implies that the Apostle is thinking, not so much of a continuous bestowment, as of a definite moment when this great gift was bestowed upon the man to whom he is speaking.

So the first question is, when was that Spirit given to these Roman Christians? The Christian Church has been split in two by its answers to that question. One influential part, which has taken a new lease of life amongst us to-day, says 'in baptism,' and the other says 'at the moment of faith.' I am not going to be tempted into controversial paths now, for my purpose is a very different one, but I cannot help just a word about the former of these two answers. 'Given in baptism,' say our friends, and I venture to think that they thereby degrade Christianity into a system of magic, bringing together two entirely disparate things, an external physical act and a spiritual change. I do not say anything about the disastrous effects that have followed from such a conception of the medium by which this greatest of all Christian gifts is effected upon men. Since the Spirit who is given is life, the result of the gift of that Spirit is a new life, and we all know what disastrous and debasing consequences have followed from that dogma of regeneration by baptism. No doubt it is perfectly true that normally, in the early Church, the Divine Spirit was given at baptism; but for one thing, that general rule had exceptions, as in the case of Cornelius, and, for another thing, though it was given *at* baptism, it was not given *in* baptism, but it was given through faith, of which in those days baptism was the sequel and the sign.

But I pass altogether from this, and fall back on the great words which, to me at least, if there were no other, would determine the whole answer to this question as to when the Spirit was given: 'This spake He of the Holy Ghost, which they that *believe* on Him should receive'; and I would ask the modern upholders of the other theory the indignant question which the Apostle Paul fired off out of his heavy artillery at their ancient analogues, the circumcisers in the Galatian Church: 'This only would I know of you: Received ye the Holy Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?'

The answer which the evangelical Christian gives to this ancient question suggested by my text, 'When was that Divine Spirit bestowed?' is congruous with the spirituality of the Christian faith, and is eminently reasonable. For the condition required is the opening of the whole nature in willing welcome to the entrance of the Divine Spirit, and as surely as, wherever there is an indentation of the land, and a concavity of a receptive bay, the ocean will pour into it and fill it, so surely where a heart is open for God, God in His Divine Spirit will enter into that heart, and there will shed His blessed influences.

So, dear brethren, and this is the main point to which I wish to direct your attention, the Apostle here takes it for granted that all these Roman Christians knew in themselves the truth of what he was saying, and had an experience which confirmed his assertion that the Divine Spirit of God was given to them when they believed. Ah! I wonder if that is true about us professing Christians; if we are aware in any measure of a higher life than our own having been breathed into us; if we are aware in any measure of a Divine Spirit dwelling in our spirits, moulding, lifting, enlightening, guiding, constraining, and yet not coercing? We ought to be. 'Know ye not that the Spirit dwelleth in you, except ye be rejected?' Brethren, it seems to me to be of the very last importance, in this period of the Church's history, that the proportion between the Church's teaching as to the work of Christ on the Cross, and as to the consequent work of the Spirit of Christ in our hearts and spirits, should be changed. We must become more mystical if we are not to become less Christian. And the fact that so many of us seem to imagine that the whole Gospel lies in this that 'He died for our sins according to the Scriptures,. and have relegated the teaching that He, by His Spirit, lives in us, if we are His disciples, to a less prominent place, has done enormous harm, not only to the type of Christian life, but to the conception of what Christianity is, both amongst those who receive it, and amongst those who do not accept it, making it out to be nothing more than a means of escape from the consequences of our transgression, instead of recognising it for what it is, the impartation of a new life which will flower into all beauty, and bear fruit in all goodness.

There was a question put once to a group of disciples, in astonishment and incredulity, by this Apostle, when he said to the twelve disciples in Ephesus, 'Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?' The question might well be put to a multitude of professing Christians amongst us, and I am afraid a great many of them, if they answered truly, would answer as those disciples did, 'We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.'

And now for the second point in my text—

II. The love which is shed abroad by that Spirit.

Now, I suppose I do not need to do more than point out that 'the love of God' here means His to us, and not ours to Him, and that the metaphor employed is but partially represented by that rendering 'shed abroad.' 'Poured out' would better convey Paul's image, which is that of a flood sent coursing through the heart, or, perhaps, rather lying there, as a calm deep lake on whose unruffled surface the heavens, with all their stars, are reflected. Of course, if God's love to us thus suffuses a heart, then there follows the consciousness of that love; though it is not the consciousness of the love that the Apostle is primarily speaking of, but that which lies behind it, the actual flowing into the human heart of that sweet and all-satisfying Love. This Divine Spirit that dwells in us, if we are trusting in Christ, will pour it in full streams into our else empty hearts. Surely there is nothing incongruous with the nature either of God or of man, in believing that thus a real communication is possible between them, and that by thoughts the occasions of which we cannot trace, by moments of elevation, by swift, piercing convictions, by sudden clear illuminations, God may speak, and will speak, in our waiting hearts.

'Such rebounds the inmost ear
Catches often from afar.
Listen, prize them, hold them dear;
For of God, of God, they are.'

But we must not forget, too, that, according to the whole strain of New Testament thinking, the means by which that Divine Spirit does pour out the flashing flood of the love of God into a man's heart is, as Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, by taking the things of Christ and showing them to us.

Now, as I said about a former point of my sermon, that the Apostle was taking for granted that this gift of the Spirit belonged to all Christian people: so here again he takes for granted that in every Christian heart there is, by a divine operation, the presence of the love, and of the consciousness of the love, of God. And, again, the question comes to some of us stunningly, to all of us warningly, Is that a transcript of our experience? It is the ideal of a Christian life: it is meant that it should be so, and should be so continuously. The stream that is poured out is intended to run summer and winter, not to be dried up in drought, nor made turbid and noisy in flood, but with equable flow throughout. I fear me that the experience of most good people is rather like one of those tropical wadies, or nullahs in Eastern lands, where there alternate times of spate and times of drought; and instead of a flashing stream, pouring life everywhere, and full to the top of its banks, there is for long periods a dismal stretch of white sun-baked stones, and a chaos of tumbled rocks with not a drop of water in the channel. The Spirit pours God's love into men's spirits, but there may be dams and barriers, so that no drop of the water comes into the empty heart.

Our Quaker friends have a great deal to say about 'waiting for the springing of the life within us.' Never mind about the phraseology: what is meant is profoundly true, that no Christian man will realise this blessing unless he knows how to sit still and meditate, and let the gracious influence soak into him. Thus being quiet, he may, he will, find rising in his heart the consciousness of the love of God. You will not, if you give only broken momentary sidelong glances; you will not, if you do not lie still. If you hold up a cup in a shaking hand beneath a fountain, and often twitch it aside, you will get little water in it; and unless we 'wait on the Lord,' we shall not 'renew our strength.' You can build a dam as they do in Holland that will keep out, not only the waters of a river, but the waters of an ocean, and not a drop will come through the dike. Brethren, we must keep ourselves in the love of God.

Lastly, we have here—

III. The hope that is established by the love poured out.

I need not dwell at any length upon this point, because, to a large extent, it has been anticipated in former sermons, but just a word or two may be permitted me. That love, you may be very sure, is not going to lose its objects in the dust. The old Psalmist who knew so much less than we do as to the love of God, and knew nothing of the whispers of a Divine Spirit within his heart charged with the message of the love as it was manifested in Jesus Christ, had risen to a height of confidence, the beauty of the expression of which is often lost sight of, because we insist upon dealing with it as merely being a Messianic prophecy, which it is, but not merely: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol, neither wilt Thou suffer Thy beloved' (for that is the real meaning of the word translated 'thy Holy One')—'Thou wilt not suffer the child of Thy love to see corruption.' Death's bony fingers can untie all true lover's knots but one; and they fumble at that one in vain. God will not lose His child in the grave.

That love, we may be very sure, will not foster in hopes that are to be disappointed. Now, it is a fact that the more a man feels that God loves him, the less is it possible for him to believe that that love will ever terminate, or that he shall 'all die.' In the lock of a canal, as the water pours in, the vessel rises. In our hearts, as the flood of the full love of God pours in, our hopes are borne up and up, nearer and nearer to the heavens. Since it is so, we must find in the fact that the constant and necessary result of communion with Him here on earth is a conviction of the immortality of that communion, a very, very strong guarantee for ourselves that the hope is not in vain. And if you say that that is all merely subjective, yet I think that the universality of the experience is a fact to be taken into account even by those who doubt the reality of the hope, and for ourselves, at all events, is a sufficient ground on which to rest. We have the historical fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have the fact that wherever there has been earthly experience of true communion with God, there, and in the measure in which it has been realised, the thermometer of our hopes of immortality, so to speak, has risen. 'God is love,' and God will not bring the man that trusts Him to confusion.

And may we not venture to say that, contemplating the analogous earthly love, we are permitted to believe that that divine Lover of our souls desires to have His beloved with Him, and desires that there be no separation between Him and them, either, if I might so say, in place or in disposition? As certainly as husband and wife, lover and friend, long to be together, and need it for perfection and for rest, so surely will that divine love not be satisfied until it has gathered all its children to its breast and made them partakers of itself.

There are many, many hopes that put the men who cherish them to shame, partly because they are never fulfilled, partly because, though fulfilled, they are disappointed, since the reality is so much less than the anticipation. Who does not know that the spray of blossom on the tree looks far more lovely hanging above our heads than when it is grasped by us? Who does not know that the fish struggling on the hook seems heavier than it turns out to be when lying on the bank? We go to the rainbow's end, and we find, not a pot of gold, but a huddle of cold, wet mist. There is one man that is entitled to say: 'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' Who is he? Only the man whose hope is in the Lord his God. If we open our hearts by faith, then these three lines of sequence of which we have been speaking will converge, and we shall have the hope that is the shining apex of 'being justified by faith,' and the hope that is the calm result of trouble and agitation, and the hope that, travelling further and higher than anything in our inward experience or our outward discipline, grasps the key-word of the universe, 'God is love,' and triumphantly makes sure that 'neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

WHAT PROVES GOD'S LOVE

'God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.'—ROMANS v. 8.

WE have seen in previous sermons on the preceding context that the Apostle has been tracing various lines of sequence, all of which converge upon Christian hope. The last of these pointed to the fact that the love of God, poured into a heart like oil into a lamp, brightened that flame; and having thus mentioned the great Christian revelation of God as love, Paul at once passes to emphasise the historical fact on which the conviction of that love rests, and goes on to say that 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us, *for* when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.' Then there rises before him the thought of how transcendent and unparalleled a love is that which pours its whole preciousness on unworthy and unresponsive hearts. He thinks to himself—'We are all ungodly; without strength—yet, He died for us. Would any man do that? No! for,' says he, 'it will be a hard thing to find any one ready to die for a righteous man—a man rigidly just and upright, and because rigidly just, a trifle hard, and therefore not likely to touch a heart to sacrifice; and even for a good man, in whom austere righteousness has been softened and made attractive, and become graciousness and beneficence, well! it is just within the limits of possibility that somebody might be found even to die for a man that had laid such a strong hand upon his affections. But God commendeth His love in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.' Now, when Paul says 'commend,' he uses a very significant word which is employed in two ways in the New Testament. It sometimes means to establish, or to prove, or to make certain. But 'prove' is a cold word, and the expression also means to recommend, to set forth in such a way as to appeal to the heart, and God does both in that great act. He establishes the fact, and He, as it were, sweeps it into a man's heart, on the bosom of that full tide of self-sacrifice.

So there are two or three points that arise from these words, on which I desire to dwell now—to lay them upon our hearts, and not only upon our understandings. For it is a poor thing to prove the love of God, and we need that not only shall we be sure of it, but that we shall be softened by it. So now let me ask you to look with me, first, at this question—

I. What Paul thought Jesus Christ died for.

'Died *for* us.' Now that expression plainly implies two things: first, that Christ died of His own accord, and being impelled by a great motive, beneficence; and, second, that that voluntary death, somehow or other, is for our behoof and advantage. The word in the original, 'for,' does not define in what way that death ministers to our advantage, but it does assert that for those Roman Christians who had never seen Jesus Christ, and by consequence for you and me nineteen centuries off the Cross, there is benefit in the fact of that death. Now, suppose we quote an incident in the story of missionary martyrdom. There was a young lady, whom some of us knew and loved, in a Chinese mission station, who, with the rest of the missionary band, was flying. Her life was safe. She looked back, and saw a Chinese boy that her heart twined round, in danger. She returned to save him; they laid hold of her and flung her into the burning house, and her charred remains have never been found. That was a death for another, but 'Jesus died for us' in a deeper sense than that. Take another case. A man sets himself to some great cause, not his own, and he sees that in order to bless humanity, either by the proclamation of some truth, or by the origination of some great movement, or in some other way, if he is to carry out his purpose he must give his life. He does so, and dies a martyr. What he aimed at could only be done by the sacrifice of his life. The death was a means to his end, and he died for his fellows. That is not the depth of the sense in which Paul meant that Jesus Christ died for us. It was not that He was true to His message, and, like many another martyr, died. There is only one way, as it seems to me, in which any beneficial relation can be established between the Death of Christ and us, and it is that when He died He died for us, because 'He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.'

Dear brethren, I dare say some of you do not take that view, but I know not how justice can be done to the plain words of Scripture unless this is the point of view from which we look at the Cross of Calvary—that there the Lamb of Sacrifice was bearing, and bearing away, the sins of the whole world. I know that Christian men who unite in the belief that Christ's death was a sacrifice and an atonement diverge from one another in their interpretations of the way in which that came to be a fact, and I believe, for my part, that the divergent interpretations are like the divergent beams of light that fall upon men who stand round the same great luminary, and that all of them take their origin in, and are part of the manifestation of, the one transcendent fact, which passes all understanding, and gathers into itself all the diverse conceptions of it which are formed by limited minds. He died for us because, in His death, our sins are taken away and we are restored to the divine favour.

I know that Jesus Christ is said to have made far less of that aspect of His work in the Gospels than His disciples have done in the Epistles, and that we are told that, if we go back to Jesus, we shall not find the doctrine which for some of us is the first form in which the Gospel finds its way into the hearts of men. I admit that the fully-developed teaching followed the fact, as was necessarily the case. I do not admit that Jesus Christ 'spake nothing concerning Himself' as the sacrifice for the world's sins. For I hear from His lips—not to dwell upon other sayings which I could quote—I hear from His lips, 'The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister'—that is only half His purpose—'and to give His life a ransom instead of the many.' You cannot strike the atoning aspect of His death out of that expression by any fair handling of the words.

And what does the Lord's Supper mean? Why did Jesus Christ select that one point of His life as the point to be remembered? Why did He institute the double memorial, the body parted from the blood being a sign of a violent death? I know of no explanation that makes that Lord's Supper an intelligible rite except the explanation which says that He came, to live indeed, and in that life to be a sacrifice, but to make the sacrifice complete by Himself bearing the consequences of transgression, and making atonement for the sins of the world.

Brethren, that is the only aspect of Christ's death which makes it of any consequence to us. Strip it of that, and what does it matter to me that He died, any more than it matters to me that any philanthropist, any great teacher, any hero or martyr or saint, should have died? As it seems to me, nothing. Christ's death is surrounded by tenderly pathetic and beautiful accompaniments. As a story it moves the hearts of men, and 'purges them, by pity and by terror.' But the death of many a hero of tragedy does all that

And if you want to have the Cross of Christ held upright in its place as the Throne of Christ and the attractive power for the whole world, you must not tamper with that great truth, but say, 'He died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.'

Now, there is a second question that I wish to ask, and that is—

II. How does Christ's death 'commend' God's love?

That is a strange expression, if you will think about it, that '*God* commendeth His love towards us in that *Christ* died.' If you take the interpretation of Christ's death of which I have already been speaking, one could have understood the Apostle if he had said, 'Christ commendeth His love towards us in that Christ died.' But where is the force of the fact of a *man's* death to prove *God's* love? Do you not see that underlying that swift sentence of the Apostle there is a presupposition, which he takes for granted? It is so obvious that I do not need to dwell upon it to vindicate his change of persons, viz. that 'God was in Christ,' in such fashion as that whatsoever Christ did was the revelation of God. You cannot suppose, at least I cannot see how you can, that there is any force of proof in the words of my text, unless you come up to the full belief, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.'

Suppose some great martyr who dies for his fellows. Well, all honour to him, and the race will come to his tomb for a while, and bring their wreaths and their sorrow. But what bearing has his death upon our knowledge of God's love towards us? None whatever, or at most a very indirect and shadowy one. We have to dig deeper down than that. 'God commends His love . . . in that Christ died.' 'He that hath seen

Me hath seen the Father.' And we have the right and the obligation to argue back from all that is manifest in the tender Christ to the heart of God, and say, not only, 'God so loved the world that He' sent His Son, but to see that the love that was in Christ is the manifestation of the love of God Himself.

So there stands the Cross, the revelation to us, not only of a Brother's sacrifice, but of a Father's love; and that because Jesus Christ is the revelation of God as being the 'eradiation of His glory, and the express image of His person.' Friends! light does pour out from that Cross, whatever view men take of it. But the omnipotent beam, the all-illuminating radiance, the transforming light, the heat that melts, are all dependent on our looking at it—I do not only say, as Paul looked at it, nor do I even say as Christ looked at it, but as the deep necessities of humanity require that the world should look at it, as the altar whereon is laid the sacrifice for our sins, the very Son of God Himself. To me the great truths of the Incarnation and the Atonement of Jesus Christ are not points in a mere speculative theology; they are the pulsating vital centre of religion. And every man needs them in his own experience.

I was going to have said a word or two here—but it is not necessary—about the need that the love of God should be irrefragably established, by some plain and undeniable and conspicuous fact. I need not dwell upon the ambiguous oracles which—

> 'Nature, red in tooth and claw,
> With rapine'

gives forth, nor on how the facts of human life, our own sorrows, and the world's miseries, the tears that swathe the earth, as it rolls on its orbit, like a misty atmosphere, war against the creed that God is love. I need not remind you, either, of how deep, in our own hearts, when the conscience begins to speak its *not* ambiguous oracles, there does rise the conviction that there is much in us which it is impossible should be the object of God's love. Nor need I remind you how all these difficulties in believing in a God who is love, based on the contradictory aspects of nature, and the mysteries of providence, and the whisperings of our own consciousness, are proved to have been insuperable by the history of the world, where we find mythologies and religions of all types and gods of every sort, but nowhere in all the pantheon a God who is Love.

Only let me press upon you that that conviction of the love of God, which is found now far beyond the limits of Christian faith, and amongst many of us who, in the name of that conviction itself, reject Christianity, because of its sterner aspects, is historically the child of the evangelical doctrine of the Incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And if it still subsists, as I know it does, especially in this generation, amongst many men who reject what seems to me to be the very kernel of Christianity—subsists like the stream cut off from its source, but still running, that only shows that men hold many convictions the origin of which they do not know. God is love. You will not permanently sustain that belief against the pressure of outward mysteries and inward sorrows, unless you grasp the other conviction that Christ died for our sins. The two are inseparable.

And now lastly—

III. What kind of love does Christ's death declare to us as existing in God?

A love that is turned away by no sin—that is the thing that strikes the Apostle here, as I have already pointed out. The utmost reach of human affection might be that a man would die for the good—he would scarcely die for the righteous. But God sends His Son, and comes Himself in His Son, and His Son died for the ungodly and the sinner. That death reveals a love which is its own origin and motive. We love because we discern, or fancy we do, something lovable in the object. God loves under the impulse, so to speak, of His own welling-up heart.

And yet it is a love which, though not turned away by any sin, is witnessed by that death to be rigidly righteous. It is no mere flaccid, flabby laxity of a loose-girt affection, no mere foolish indulgence like that whereby earthly parents spoil their children. God's love is not lazy good-nature, as a great many of us think it to be and so drag it in the mud, but it is rigidly righteous, and therefore Christ died. That Death witnesses that it is a love which shrinks from no sacrifices. This Isaac was not 'spared.' God gave up His Son. Love has its very speech in surrender, and God's love speaks as ours does. It is a love which, turned away by no sin, and yet rigidly righteous and shrinking from no sacrifices, embraces all ages and lands. 'God commendeth'—not 'commended.' The majestic present tense suggests that time and space are nothing to the swift and all-filling rays of that great Light. That love is 'towards us,' you and me and all our fellows. The Death is an historical fact, occurring in one short hour. The Cross is an eternal power, raying out light and love over all humanity and through all ages.

God lays siege to all hearts in that great sacrifice.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for *your* sins 'according to the Scriptures'? Do you see there the assurance of a love which will lift you up above all the cross-currents of earthly life, and the mysteries of providence, into the clear ether where the sunshine is unobscured? And above all, do you fling back the reverberating ray from the mirror of your own heart that directs again towards heaven the beam of love which heaven has shot down upon you? 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and gave His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' Is it true of us that we love God because He first loved us?

THE WARRING QUEENS

'As sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.'—ROMANS v. 21.

I AM afraid this text will sound to some of you rather unpromising. It is full of well-worn terms, 'sin,' 'death,' 'grace,' 'righteousness,' 'eternal life,' which suggest dry theology, if they suggest anything. When they welled up from the Apostle's glowing heart they were like a fiery lava-stream. But the stream has cooled, and, to a good many of us, they seem as barren and sterile as the long ago cast out coils of lava on the sides of a quiescent volcano. They are so well-worn and familiar to our ears that they create but vague conceptions in our minds, and they seem to many of us to be far away from a bearing upon our daily lives. But you much mistake Paul if you take him to be a mere theological writer. He is an earnest evangelist, trying to draw men to love and trust in Jesus Christ. And his writings, however old-fashioned and doctrinally hard they may seem to you, are all throbbing with life—instinct with truths that belong to all ages and places, and which fit close to every one of us.

I do not know if I can give any kind of freshness to these words, but I wish to try. To begin with, I notice the highly-imaginative and picturesque form into which the Apostle casts his thoughts here. He, as it were, draws back a curtain, and lets us see two royal figures, which are eternally opposed and dividing the dominion between them. Then he shows us the issues to which these two rulers respectively conduct their subjects; and the question that is trembling on his lips is 'Under which of them do you stand?' Surely that is not fossil theology, but truths that are of the highest importance, and ought to be of the deepest interest, to every one of us. They are to you the former, whether they are the latter or not.

I. So, first, look at the two Queens who rule over human life.

Sin and Grace are both personified; and they are both conceived of as female figures, and both as exercising dominion. They stand face to face, and each recognises as her enemy the other. The one has established her dominion: 'Sin *hath* reigned.' The other is fighting to establish hers: 'That Grace *might* reign.' And the struggle is going on between them, not only on the wide field of the world; but in the narrow lists of the heart of each of us.

Sin reigns. The truths that underlie that solemn picture are plain enough, however unwelcome they may be to some of us, and however remote from the construction of the universe which many of us are disposed to take.

Now, let us understand our terms. Suppose a man commits a theft. You may describe it from three different points of view. He has thereby broken the law of the land; and when we are thinking about that we call it crime. He has also broken the law of 'morality,' as we call it; and when we are looking at his deed from that point of view, we call it vice. Is that all? He has broken something else. He has broken the law of God; and when we look at it from that point of view we call it sin. Now, there are a great many things which are sins that are not crimes; and, with due limitations, I might venture to say that there are some things which are sins that are not to be qualified as vices. Sin implies God. The Psalmist was quite right when he said; 'Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned'; although he was confessing a foul injury he had done to Bathsheba, and a glaring crime that he had committed against Uriah. It was as to God, and in reference to Him only, that his crime and his vice darkened and solidified into sin.

And what is it, in our actions or in ourselves considered in reference to God, that makes our actions sins and ourselves sinners? Remember the prodigal son. 'Father! Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.' There you have it all. He went away, and 'wasted his substance in riotous living.' To claim myself for my own; to act independently of, or contrary to, the will of God; to try to shake myself clear of Him; to have nothing to do with Him, even though it be by mere forgetfulness and negligence, and, in all my ways to comport myself as if I had no relations of dependence on and submission to him —that is sin. And there may be that oblivion or rebellion, not only in the gross vulgar acts which the law calls crimes, or in those which conscience declares to be vices, but also in many things which, looked at from a lower point of view, may be fair and pure and noble. If there is this assertion of self in them, or oblivion of God and His will in them, I know not how we are to escape the conclusion that even these fall under the class of sins. For there can be no act or thought, truly worthy of a man, situated and circumstanced as we are, which has not, for the very core and animating motive of it, a reference to God.

Now, when I come and say, as my Bible teaches me to say, that this is the deepest view of the state of humanity that sin reigns, I do not wish to fall into the exaggerations by which sometimes that statement has been darkened and discredited; but I do want to press upon you, dear brethren, this, as a matter of *personal* experience, that wherever there is a heart that loves, and leaves God out, and wherever there is a will that resolves, determines, impels to action, and does not bow itself before Him, and wherever there are hands that labour, or feet that run, at tasks and in paths self-chosen and unconsecrated by reference to our Father in heaven, no matter how great and beautiful subsidiary lustres may light up their deeds, the very heart of them all is transgression of the law of God. For this, and nothing else or less, is His law: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.' I do not charge you with crimes. You know how far it would be right to charge you with vices. *I* do not charge you with anything; but I pray you to come with me and confess: 'We all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.'

I suppose I need not dwell upon the difficulty of getting a lodgment for this conviction in men's hearts.

There is no sadder, and no more conclusive proof, of the tremendous power of sin over us, than that it has lulled us into unconsciousness, hard to be broken, of its own presence and existence. You remember the old stories—I suppose there is no truth in them, but they will do for an illustration—about some kind of a blood-sucking animal that perched upon a sleeping man, and with its leathern wings fanned him into deeper drowsiness whilst it drew from him his life-blood. That is what this hideous Queen does for men. She robes herself in a dark cloud, and sends out her behests from obscurity. And men fancy that they are free whilst all the while they are her servants. Oh, dear brethren! you may call this theology, but it is a simple statement of the facts of our condition. 'Sin hath reigned.'

And now turn to the other picture, 'Grace might reign.' Then there is an antagonistic power that rises up to confront the widespread dominion of this anarch of old. And this Queen comes with twenty thousand to war against her that has but ten thousand on her side.

Again I say, let us understand our terms. I suppose, there are few of the keywords of the New Testament which have lost more of their radiance, like quicksilver, by exposure in the air during the centuries than that great word Grace, which is always on the lips of this Apostle, and to him had music in its sound, and which to us is a piece of dead doctrine, associated with certain high Calvinistic theories which we enlightened people have long ago grown beyond, and got rid of. Perhaps Paul was more right than we when his heart leaped up within him at the very thought of all which he saw to lie palpitating and throbbing with eager desire to bless men, in that great word. What does he mean by it? Let me put it into the shortest possible terms. This antagonist Queen is nothing but the love of God raying out for ever to us inferior creatures, who, by reason of our sinfulness, have deserved something widely different. Sin stands there, a hideous hag, though a queen; Grace stands here, 'in all her gestures dignity and love,' fair and self-communicative, though a sovereign. The love of God in exercise to sinful men: that is what the New Testament means by grace. And is it not a great thought?

Notice, for further elucidation of the Apostle's conception, how he sacrifices the verbal correctness of his antithesis in order to get to the real opposition. What is the opposite of Sin? Righteousness. Why does he not say, then, that 'as Sin hath reigned unto death, even so might Righteousness reign unto life'? Why? Because it is not man, or anything in man, that can be the true antagonist of, and victor over, the regnant Sin of humanity; but God Himself comes into the field, and only He is the foe that Sin dreads. That is to say, the only hope for a sin-tyrannised world is in the outthrob of the love of the great heart of God. For, notice the weapon with which He fights man's transgression, if I may vary the figure for a moment. It is only subordinately punishment, or law, or threatening, or the revelation of the wickedness of the transgression. All these have their places, but they are secondary places. The thing that will conquer a world's wickedness is nothing else but the manifested love of God. Only the patient shining down of the sun will ever melt the icebergs that float in all our hearts. And wonderful and blessed it is to think that, in whatsoever aspects man's sin may have been an interruption and a contradiction of the divine purpose, out of the evil has come a good; that the more obdurate and universal the rebellion, the more has it evoked a deeper and more wondrous tenderness. The blacker the thundercloud, the brighter glows the rainbow that is flung across it So these two front each other, the one settled in her established throne—

'Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell—'

the other coming on her adventurous errand to conquer the world to herself, and to banish the foul tyranny under which men groan. 'Sin hath reigned.' Grace is on her way to her dominion.

II. Notice the gifts of these two Queens to their subjects.

'Sin hath reigned in death' (as the accurate translation has it); 'Grace reigns unto eternal life.' The one has established her dominion, and its results are wrought out, her reign is, as it were, a reign in a cemetery; and her subjects are dead. If you want a modern instance to illustrate an ancient saw, think of Armenia. There is a reign whose gifts to its subjects are death. Sin reigns, says Paul, and for proof points to the fact that men die.

Now, I am not going to enter into the question here, and now, whether physical death passes over mankind because of the fact of transgression. I do not suppose that this is so. But I ask you to remember that when the Bible says that 'Death passed upon all men, for all have sinned,' it does not merely mean the physical fact of dissolution, but it means that fact along with the accompaniments of it, and the forerunners of it, in men's consciences. 'The sting of death is sin,' says Paul, in another place. By which he implies, I presume, that, if it were not for the fact of alienation from God and opposition to His holy will, men might lie down and die as placidly as an animal does, and might strip themselves for it 'as for a bed, that longing they'd been sick for.' No doubt, there was death in the world long before there were men in it. No doubt, also, the complex whole phenomenon gets its terror from the fact of men's sin.

But it is not so much that physical fact with its accompaniments which Paul is thinking about when he says that 'sin reigns in death,' as it is that solemn truth which he is always reiterating, and which I pray you, dear friends, to lay to heart, that, whatever activity there may be in the life of a man who has rent himself away from dependence upon God—however vigorous his brain, however active his hand, however full charged with other interests his life, in the very depth of it it is a living death, and the right name for it *is* death. So this is Sin's gift—that over our whole nature there come mortality and decay, and that they who live as her subjects are dead whilst they live. Dear brethren, that may be figurative, but it seems to me that it is absurd for you to turn away from such thoughts, shrug your shoulders, and say, 'Old-fashioned Calvinistic theology!' It is simply putting into a vivid form the facts of your life and of your condition in relation to God, if you are subjects of Sin.

Then, on the other hand, the other queenly figure has her hands filled with one great gift which, like the fatal bestowment which Sin gives to her subjects, has two aspects, a present and a future one. Life, which is given in our redemption from Death and Sin, and in union with God; that is the present gift that the love of God holds out to every one of us. That life, in its very incompleteness here, carries in itself the prophecy of its own completion hereafter, in a higher form and world, just as truly as the bud is the prophet of the flower and of the fruit; just as truly as a half-reared building is the prophecy of its own completion when the rooftree is put upon it. The men that here have, as we all may have if we choose, the gift of life eternal in the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ His Son, must necessarily tend onwards and upwards to a region where Death is beneath the horizon, and Life flows and flushes the whole heaven. Brother! do you put out your whole hand to take the poisoned gift from the claw-like hand of that hideous Queen; or do you turn and take the gift of life eternal from the hands of the queenly Grace?

III. How this queenly Grace gives her gifts.

You observe that the Apostle, as is his wont—I was going to say—gets himself entangled in a couple of almost parenthetical or, at all events, subsidiary sentences. I suppose when he began to write he meant to say, simply, 'as Sin hath reigned unto death, so Grace might reign unto life.' But notice that he inserts two qualifications: 'through righteousness, 'through Jesus Christ our Lord.' What does he mean by these?

He means this, first, that even that great love of God, coming throbbing straight from His heart, cannot give eternal life as a mere matter of arbitrary will. God can make His sun to shine and His rain to fall, 'on the unthankful and on the evil,' and if God could, God would give eternal life to everybody, bad and good; but He cannot. There must be righteousness if there is to be life. Just as sin's fruit is death, the fruit of righteousness is life.

He means, in the next place, that whilst there is no life without righteousness, there is no righteousness without God's gift. You cannot break away from the dominion of Sin, and, as it were, establish yourselves in a little fortress of your own, repelling her assaults by any power of yours. Dear brethren, we cannot undo the past; we cannot strip off the poisoned garment that clings to our limbs; we can mend ourselves in many respects, but we cannot of our own volition and motion clothe ourselves with that righteousness of which the wearers shall be worthy to 'pass through the gate into the city.' There is no righteousness without God's gift.

And the other subsidiary clause completes the thought: 'through Christ.' In Him is all the grace, the manifest love, of God gathered together. It is not diffused as the nebulous light in some chaotic incipient system, but it is gathered into a sun that is set in the centre, in order that it may pour down warmth and life upon its circling planets. The grace of God is in Christ Jesus our Lord. In Him is life eternal; therefore, if we desire to possess it we must possess Him. In Him is righteousness; therefore, if we desire our own foulness to be changed into the holiness which shall see God, we must go to Jesus Christ. Grace reigns in life, but it is life through righteousness, which is through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So, then, brother, my message and my petition to each of you are—knit yourself to Him by faith in Him. Then He who is 'full of grace and truth' will come to you; and, coming, will bring in His hands righteousness and life eternal. If only we rest ourselves on Him, and keep ourselves close in touch with Him; then we shall be delivered from the tyranny of the

darkness, and translated into the Kingdom of the Son of His love.

'THE FORM OF TEACHING'

'. . . Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.'—ROMANS vi. 17.

THERE is room for difference of opinion as to what Paul precisely means by 'form' here. The word so rendered appears in English as *type*, and has a similar variety of meaning. It signifies originally a mark made by pressure or impact; and then, by natural transitions, a *mould*, or more generally a *pattern* or *example*, and then the copy of such an example or pattern, or the cast from such a mould. It has also the other meaning which its English equivalent has taken on very extensively of late years, such as, for instance, you find in expressions like 'An English type of face,' meaning thereby the general outline which preserves the distinguishing characteristics of a thing. Now we may choose between these two meanings in our text. If the Apostle means type in the latter sense of the word, then the rendering 'form' is adequate, and he is thinking of the Christian teaching which had been given to the Roman Christians as possessing certain well-defined characteristics which distinguished it from other kinds of teaching—such, for instance, as Jewish or heathen.

But if we take the other meaning, then he is, in true Pauline fashion, bringing in a vivid and picturesque metaphor to enforce his thought, and is thinking of the teaching which the Roman Christians had received as being a kind of mould into which they were thrown, a pattern to which they were to be conformed. And that that is his meaning seems to me to be made a little more probable by the fact that the last words of my text would be more accurate if inverted, and instead of reading, as the Authorised Version does, 'that form of doctrine which was delivered you,' we were to read, as the Revised Version does, 'that form whereunto ye were delivered.'

If this be the general meaning of the words before us, there are three thoughts arising from them to which I turn briefly. First, Paul's Gospel was a definite body of teaching; secondly, that teaching is a mould for conduct and character; lastly, that teaching therefore demands obedience. Take, then, these three thoughts.

I. First, Paul's Gospel was a definite body of teaching.

Now the word 'doctrine,' which is employed in my text, has, in the lapse of years since the Authorised Version was made, narrowed its significance. At the date of our Authorised translation 'doctrine' was probably equivalent to 'teaching,' of whatever sort it might be. Since then it has become equivalent to a statement of abstract principles, and that is not at all what Paul means. He does not mean to say that his gospel was a form of doctrine in the sense of being a theological system, but he means to say that it was a body of teaching, the nature of the teaching not being defined at all by the word.

Therefore we have to notice that the great, blessed peculiarity of the Gospel is that it is a teaching, not of abstract dry principles, but of concrete historical facts. From these principles in plenty may be gathered, but in its first form as it comes to men fresh from God it is not a set of propositions, but a history of deeds that were done upon earth. And, therefore, is it fitted to be the food of every soul and the mould of every character.

Jesus Christ did not come and talk to men about God, and say to them what His Apostles afterwards said, 'God is love,' but He lived and died, and that mainly was His teaching about God. He did not come to men and lay down a theory of atonement or a doctrine of propitiation, or theology about sin and its relations to God, but He went to the Cross and gave Himself for us, and that was His teaching about sacrifice. He did not say to men 'There is a future life, and it is of such and such a sort,' but He came out of the grave and He said 'Touch Me, and handle Me. A spirit hath not flesh and bones,' and *therefore* He brought life and immortality to light, by no empty words but by the solid realities of facts. He did not lecture upon ethics, but He lived a perfect human life out of which all moral principles that will guide human conduct may be gathered. And so, instead of presenting us with a *hortus siccus*, with a botanic collection of scientifically arranged and dead propositions, He led us into the meadow where the flowers grow, living and fair. His life and death, with all that they imply, are the teaching.

Let us not forget, on the other hand, that the history of a fact is not the mere statement of the outward thing that has happened. Suppose four people, for instance, standing at the foot of Christ's Cross; four other 'evangelists' than the four that we know. There is a Roman soldier; there is a Pharisee; there is one of the weeping crowd of poor women, not disciples; and there is a disciple. The first man tells the fact as he saw it: 'A Jewish rebel was crucified this morning'

The second man tells the fact: 'A blaspheming apostate suffered what he deserved to-day.' The woman tells the fact: 'A poor, gentle, fair soul was martyred to-day.' And the fourth one tells the fact: 'Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died for our sins.' The three tell the same fact; the fourth preaches the Gospel—that is to say, Christian teaching is the facts plus their explanation; and it is that which differentiates it from the mere record which is of no avail to anybody. So Paul himself in one of his other letters puts it. This is his gospel: Jesus of Nazareth 'died for *our* sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried, and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.' That is what turns the bald story of the facts into teaching, which is the mould for life.

So on the one hand, dear brethren, do not let us fall into the superficial error of fancying that our religion is a religion of emotion and morality only. It is a religion with a basis of divine truth, which, being struck away, all the rest goes. There is a revolt against dogma to-day, a revolt which in large measure is justified as an essential of progress, and in large measure as an instance of progress; but human nature is ever prone to extremes, and in the revolt from man's dogma there is danger of casting away God's truth. Christianity is not preserved when we hold by the bare facts of the outward history, unless we take with these facts the interpretation of them, which declares the divinity and the sacrifice of the Son of God.

And on the other hand, let us keep very clear in our minds the broad and impassable gulf of separation between the Christian teaching as embodied in the Scripture and the systems which Christianity has evolved therefrom. Men's intellects must work upon the pabulum that is provided for them, and a theology in a systematised form is a necessity for the intellectual and reasonable life of the Christian Church. But there is all the difference between man's inferences from and systematising of the Christian truth and the truth that lies here. The one is the golden roof that is cast over us; the other is too often but the spiders' webs that are spun across and darken its splendour. It is a sign of a wholesome change in the whole sentiment and attitude of the modern Christian mind that the word 'doctrine,' which has come to mean men's inferences from God's truth, should have been substituted as it has been in our Revised Version of my text, by the wholesome Christian word 'teaching.' The teaching is the facts with the inspired commentary on them.

II. Secondly, notice that this teaching is in Paul's judgment a mould or pattern according to which men's lives are to be conformed.

There can be no question but that, in that teaching as set forth in Scripture, there does lie the mightiest formative power for shaping our lives, and emancipating us from our evil.

Christ is *the* type, the mould into which men are to be cast. The Gospel, as presented in Scripture, gives us three things. It gives us the perfect mould; it gives us the perfect motive; it gives us the perfect power. And in all three things appears its distinctive glory, apart from and above all other systems that have ever tried to affect the conduct or to mould the character of man.

In Jesus Christ we have in due combination, in perfect proportion, all the possible excellences of humanity. As in other cases of perfect symmetry, the very precision of the balanced proportions detracts from the apparent magnitude of the statue or of the fair building, so to a superficial eye there is but little beauty there that we should desire Him, but as we learn to know Him, and live nearer to Him, and get more familiar with all His sweetness, and with all His power, He towers before us in ever greater and yet never repellent or exaggerated magnitude, and never loses the reality of His brotherhood in the completeness of His perfection. We have in the Christ the one type, the one mould and pattern for all striving, the 'glass of form,' the perfect Man.

And that likeness is not reproduced in us by pressure or by a blow, but by the slow and blessed process of gazing until we become like, beholding the glory until we are changed into the glory.

It is no use having a mould and metal unless you have a fire. It is no use having a perfect Pattern unless you have a motive to copy it. Men do not go to the devil for want of examples; and morality is not at a low ebb by reason of ignorance of what the true type of life is. But nowhere but in the full-orbed teaching of the New Testament will you find a motive strong enough to melt down all the obstinate hardness of the 'northern iron' of the human will, and to make it plastic to His hand. If we can say, 'He loved me and gave Himself for me,' then the sum of all morality, the old commandment that 'ye love one another,' receives a new stringency, and a fresh motive as well as a deepened interpretation, when His love is our pattern. The one thing that will make men willing to be like Christ is their faith that Christ is their Sacrifice and their Saviour. And sure I am of this, that no form of mutilated Christianity, which leaves out or falteringly proclaims the truth that Christ died on the Cross for the sins of the world, will ever generate heat enough to mould men's wills, or kindle motives powerful enough to lead to a life of growing imitation of and resemblance to Him. The dial may be all right, the hours most accurately marked in their proper places, every minute registered on the circle, the hands may be all right, delicately fashioned, truly poised, but if there is no main-spring inside, dial and hands are of little use, and a Christianity which says, 'Christ is the Teacher; do you obey Him?' is as impotent as the dial face with the broken main-spring. What we need, and what, thank God, in 'the teaching' we have, is the pattern brought near to us, and the motive for imitating the pattern, set in motion by the great thought, 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.'

Still further, the teaching is a power to fashion life, inasmuch as it brings with it a gift which secures the transformation of the believer into the likeness of his Lord. Part of 'the teaching' is the fact of Pentecost; part of the teaching is the fact of the Ascension; and the consequence of the Ascension and the sure promise of the Pentecost is that all who love Him, and wait upon Him, shall receive into their hearts the 'Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' which shall make them free from the law of sin and death.

So, dear friends, on the one hand, let us remember that our religion is meant to work, that we have nothing in our creed that should not be in our character, that all our *credenda* are to be our *agenda*, everything *believed* to be something *done*; and that if we content ourselves with the simple acceptance of the teaching, and make no effort to translate that teaching into life, we are hypocrites or self-deceivers.

And, on the other hand, do not let us forget that religion is the soul of which morality is the body, and that it is impossible in the nature of things that you shall ever get a true, lofty, moral life which is not based upon religion. I do not say that men cannot be sure of the outlines of their duty without Christianity, though I am free to confess that I think it is a very maimed and shabby version of human duty, which is supplied, minus the special revelation of that duty which Christianity makes; but my point is, that the knowledge will not work without the Gospel.

The Christian type of character is a distinct and manifestly separate thing from the pagan heroism or from the virtues and the righteousnesses of other systems. Just as the musician's ear can tell, by half a dozen bars, whether that strain was Beethoven's, or Handel's, or Mendelssohn's, just as the trained eye can see Raffaelle's magic in every touch of his pencil, so Christ, the Teacher, has a style; and all the scholars of His school carry with them a certain mark which tells where they got their education and who is their Master, if they are scholars indeed. And that leads me to the last word.

III. This mould demands obedience.

By the very necessity of things it is so. If the 'teaching' was but a teaching of abstract truths it would be enough to assent to them. I believe that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, and I have done my duty by that proposition when I have said 'Yes! it is so.' But the 'teaching' which Jesus Christ gives and *is*, needs a good deal more than that. By the very nature of the teaching, assent drags after it submission. You can please yourself whether you let Jesus Christ into your minds or not, but if you do let Him in, He will be Master. There is no such thing as taking Him in and not obeying.

And so the requirement of the Gospel which we call faith has in it quite as much of the element of obedience as of the element of trust. And the presence of that element is just what makes the difference between a sham and a real faith. 'Faith which has not works is dead, being alone.' A faith which is all trust and no obedience is neither trust nor obedience.

And that is why so many of us do not care to yield ourselves to the faith that is in Jesus Christ. If it simply came to us and said, 'If you will trust Me you will get pardon,' I fancy there would be a good many more of us honest Christians than are so. But Christ comes and says, 'Trust Me, follow Me, and take Me for your Master; and be like Me,' and one's will kicks, and one's passions recoil, and a thousand of the devil's servants within us prick their ears up and stiffen their backs in remonstrance and opposition. 'Submit' is Christ's first word; submit by faith, submit in love.

That heart obedience, which is the requirement of Christianity, means freedom. The Apostle draws a wonderful contrast in the context between the slavery to lust and sin, and the freedom which comes from obedience to God and to righteousness. Obey the Truth, and the Truth, in your obeying, shall make you free, for freedom is the willing submission to the limitations which are best. 'I will walk at liberty for I keep Thy precepts.' Take Christ for your Master, and, being His servants, you are your own masters, and the world's to boot. For 'all things are yours if ye are Christ's.' Refuse to bow your necks to that yoke which is easy, and to take upon your shoulders that burden which is light, and you do not buy liberty, though you buy licentiousness, for you become the slaves and downtrodden vassals of the world and the flesh and the devil, and while you promise yourselves liberty, you become the bondsmen of corruption. Oh! then, let us obey from the heart that mould of teaching to which we are delivered, and so obeying, we shall be free indeed.

'THY FREE SPIRIT'

'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.'—ROMANS viii. 2.

WE have to distinguish two meanings of law. In the stricter sense, it signifies the authoritative expressions of the will of a ruler proposed for the obedience of man; in the wider, almost figurative sense, it means nothing more than the generalised expression of constant similar facts. For instance, objects attract one another in certain circumstances with a force which in the same circumstances is always the same. When that fact is stated generally, we get the law of gravitation. Thus the word comes to mean little more than a regular process. In our text the word is used in a sense much nearer the latter than the former of these two. 'The law of sin and of death' cannot mean a series of commandments; it certainly does not mean the Mosaic law. It must either be entirely figurative, taking sin and death as two great tyrants who domineer over men; or it must mean the continuous action of these powers, the process by which they work. These two come substantially to the same idea. The law of sin and of death describes a certain constancy of operation, uniform and fixed, under the dominion of which men are struggling. But there is another constancy of operation, uniform and fixed too, a mighty antagonistic power, which frees from the dominion of the former: it is 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.'

I. The bondage.

The Apostle is speaking about himself as he was, and we have our own consciousness to verify his transcript of his own personal experience. Paul had found that, by an inexorable iron sequence, sin worked in himself the true death of the soul, in separation from God, in the extinction of good and noble capacities, in the atrophying of all that was best in himself, in the death of joy and peace. And this iron sequence he, with an eloquent paradox, calls a 'law,' though its very characteristic is that it is lawless transgression of the true law of humanity. He so describes it, partly, because he would place emphasis on its dominion over us. Sin rules with iron sway; men madly obey it, and even when they think themselves free, are under a bitter tyranny. Further, he desires to emphasise the fact that sin and death are parts of one process which operates constantly and uniformly. This dark anarchy and wild chaos of disobedience and transgression has its laws. All happens there according to rule. Rigid and inevitable as the courses of the stars, or the fall of the leaf from the tree, is sin hurrying on to its natural goal in death. In this fatal dance, sin leads in death; the one fair spoken and full of dazzling promises, the other in the end throws off the mask, and slays. It is true of all who listen to the tempting voice, and the deluded victim 'knows not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depth of hell.'

II. The method of deliverance.

The previous chapter sounded the depths of human impotence, and showed the tragic impossibility of human efforts to strip off the poisoned garment. Here the Apostle tells the wonderful story of how he himself was delivered, in the full rejoicing confidence that what availed for his emancipation would equally avail for every captived soul. Because he himself has experienced a divine power which breaks the dreadful sequence of sin and of death, he knows that every soul may share in the experience. No mere outward means will be sufficient to emancipate a spirit; no merely intellectual methods will avail to set free the passions and desires which have been captured by sin. It is vain to seek deliverance from a perverted will by any republication, however emphatic, of a law of duty. Nothing can touch the necessities of the case but a gift of power which becomes an abiding influence in us, and develops a mightier energy to overcome the evil tendencies of a sinful soul.

That communicated power must impart life. Nothing short of a Spirit of life, quick and powerful, with an immortal and intense energy, will avail to meet the need. Such a Spirit must give the life which it possesses, must quicken and bring into action dormant powers in the spirit that it would free. It must implant new energies and directions, new motives, desires, tastes, and tendencies. It must bring into play mightier attractions to neutralise and deaden existing ones; as when to some chemical compound a substance is added which has a stronger affinity for one of the elements, a new thing is made.

Paul's experience, which he had a right to cast into general terms and potentially to extend to all mankind, had taught him that such a new life for such a spirit had come to him by union with Jesus Christ. Such a union, deep and mystical as it is, is, thank God, an experience universal in all true Christians, and constitutes the very heart of the Gospel which Paul rejoiced to believe was entrusted to his hands for the world. His great message of 'Christ in us' has been wofully curtailed and mangled when his other message of 'Christ for us' has been taken, as it too often has been, to be the whole of his Gospel. They who take either of these inseparable elements to be the whole, rend into two imperfect halves the perfect oneness of the Gospel of Christ.

We are often told that Paul was the true author of Christian doctrine, and are bidden to go back from him to Jesus. If we do so, we hear His grave sweet voice uttering in the upper-room the deep words, 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches'; and, surely, Paul is but repeating, without metaphor, what Christ, once for all, set forth in that lovely emblem, when he says that 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death.' The branches in their multitude make the Vine in its unity, and the sap which rises from the deep root through the brown stem, passes to every tremulous leaf, and brings bloom and savour into every cluster. Jesus drew His emblem from the noblest form of vegetative life; Paul, in other places, draws his from the highest form of bodily life, when he points to the many members in one body, and the Head which governs all, and says, 'So also is Christ.' In another place he points to the noblest form of earthly love and unity. The blessed fellowship and sacred oneness of husband and wife are an emblem sweet, though inadequate, of the fellowship in love and unity of spirit between Christ and His Church.

And all this mysterious oneness of life has an intensely practical side. In Jesus, and by union with Him, we receive a power that delivers from sin and arrests the stealthy progress of sin's follower, death. Love to Him, the result of fellowship with Him, and the consequence of life received from Him, becomes the motive which makes the redeemed heart delight to do His will, and takes all the power out of every temptation. We are in Him, and He in us, on condition, and by means, of our humble faith; and because my faith thus knits me to Him it is 'the victory that overcomes the world,' and breaks the chains of many sins. So this communion with Jesus Christ is the way by which we shall increase that triumphant spiritual life, which is the only victorious antagonist of the else inevitable consequence which declares that the 'soul that sinneth it shall die,' and die even in sinning.

III. The process of the deliverance.

Following the R.V. we read 'made me free,' not 'hath made me.' The reference is obviously, as the Greek more clearly shows, to a single historical event, which some would take to be the Apostle's baptism, but which is more properly supposed to be his conversion. His strong bold language here does not mean that he claims to be sinless. The emancipation is effected, although it is but begun. He holds that at that moment when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, and he yielded to Him as Lord, his deliverance was real, though not complete. He was conscious of a real change of position in reference to that law of sin and of death. Paul distinguishes between the true self and the accumulation of selfish and sensual habits which make up so much of ourselves. The deeper and purer self may be vitalised in will and heart, and set free even while the emancipation is not worked out in the life. The parable of the leaven applies in the individual renewal; and there is no fanaticism, and no harm, in Paul's point of view, if only it be remembered that sins by which passion and externals overbear my better self are mine in responsibility and in consequences. Thus guarded, we may be wholly right in thinking of all the evils which still cleave to the renewed Christian soul as not being part of it, but destined to drop away.

And this bold declaration is to be vindicated as a prophetic confidence in the supremacy and ultimate dominion of the new power which works even through much antagonism in an imperfect Christian. Paul, too, calls 'things that are not as though they were.' If my spirit of life is the 'Spirit of life in Christ,' it will go on to perfection. It is Spirit, therefore it is informing and conquering the material; it is a divine Spirit, therefore it is omnipotent; it is the Spirit of life, leading in and imparting life like itself, which is kindred with it and is its source; it is the Spirit of life in Christ, therefore leading to life like His, bringing us to conformity with Him because the same causes produce the same effects; it is a life in Christ having a law and regular orderly course of development. So, just as if we have the germ we may hope for fruit, and can see the infantile oak in the tightly-shut acorn, or in the egg the creature which shall afterwards grow there, we have in this gift of the Spirit, the victory. If we have the cause, we have the effects implicitly folded in it; and we have but to wait further development.

The Christian life is to be one long effort, partial, and gradual, to unfold the freedom possessed. Paul knew full well that his emancipation was not perfect. It was, probably, after this triumphant expression of confidence that he wrote, 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.' The first stage is the gift of power, the appropriation and development of that power is the work of a life; and it ought to pass through a well-marked series and cycle of growing changes. The way to develop it is by constant application to the source of all freedom, the life-giving Spirit, and by constant effort to conquer sins and temptations. There is no such thing in the Christian conflict as a painless development. We must mortify the deeds of the body if we are to live in the Spirit. The Christian progress has in it the nature of a crucifixion. It is to be effort, steadily directed for the sake of Christ, and in the joy of His Spirit, to destroy sin, and to win practical holiness. Homely moralities are the outcome and the test of all pretensions to spiritual communion.

We are, further, to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord, by 'waiting for the Redemption,' which is not merely passive waiting, but active expectation, as of one who stretches out a welcoming hand to an approaching friend. Nor must we forget that this accomplished deliverance is but partial whilst upon earth. 'The body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness.' But there may be indefinite approximation to complete deliverance. The metaphors in Scripture under which Christian progress is described, whether drawn from a conflict or a race, or from a building, or from the growth of a tree, all suggest the idea of constant advance against hindrances, which yet, constant though it is, does not reach the goal here. And this is our noblest earthly condition—not to be pure, but to be tending towards it and conscious of impurity. Hence our tempers should be those of humility, strenuous effort, firm hope. We are as slaves who have escaped, but are still in the wilderness, with the enemies' dogs baying at our feet, but we shall come to the land of freedom, on whose sacred soil sin and death can never tread.

CHRIST CONDEMNING SIN

'For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.'—ROMANS viii. 3.

IN the first verse of this chapter we read that 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.' The reason of that is, that they are set free from the terrible sequence of cause and effect which constitutes 'the law of sin and death'; and the reason why they are freed from that awful sequence by the power of Christ is, because He has 'condemned sin in the flesh.' The occurrence of the two words 'condemnation' (ver. 1) and 'condemned' (ver. 3) should be noted. Sin is personified as dwelling in the flesh, which expression here means, not merely the body, but unregenerate human nature. He has made his fortress there, and rules over it all. The strong man keeps his house and his goods are in peace. He laughs to scorn the attempts of laws and moralities of all sorts to cast him out. His dominion is death to the human nature over which he tyrannises. Condemnation is inevitable to the men over whom he rules. They or he must perish. If he escape they die. If he could be slain they might live. Christ comes, condemns the tyrant, and casts him out. So, he being condemned, we are acquitted; and he being slain there is no death for us. Let us try to elucidate a little further this great metaphor by just pondering the two points prominent in it—Sin tyrannising over human nature and resisting all attempts to overcome it, and Christ's condemnation and casting out of the tyrant.

I. Sin tyrannising over human nature, and resisting all attempts to overcome it.

Paul is generalising his own experience when he speaks of the condemnation of an intrusive alien force that holds unregenerate human nature in bondage. He is writing a page of his own autobiography, and he is sure that all the rest of us have like pages in ours. Heart answereth unto heart as in a mirror. If each man is a unity, the poison must run through all his veins and affect his whole nature. Will, understanding, heart, must all be affected and each in its own way by the intruder; and if men are a collective whole, each man's experience is repeated in his brother's.

The Apostle is equally transcribing his own experience when in the text he sadly admits the futility of all efforts to shake the dominion of sin. He has found in his own case that even the loftiest revelation in the Mosaic law utterly fails in the attempt to condemn sin. This is true not only in regard to the Mosaic law but in regard to the law of conscience, and to moral teachings of any kind. It is obvious that all such laws do condemn sin in the sense that they solemnly declare God's judgment about it, and His sentence on it; but in the sense of real condemnation, or casting out, and depriving sin of its power, they all are impotent. The law may deter from overt acts or lead to isolated acts of obedience; it may stir up antagonism to sin's tyranny, but after that it has no more that it can do. It cannot give the purity which it proclaims to be necessary, nor create the obedience which it enjoins. Its thunders roll terrors, and no fruitful rain follows them to soften the barren soil. There always remains an unbridged gulf between the man and the law.

And this is what Paul points to in saying that it 'was weak through the flesh.' It is good in itself, but it has to work through the sinful nature. The only powers to which it can appeal are those which are already in rebellion. A discrowned king whose only forces to conquer his rebellious subjects are the rebels themselves, is not likely to regain his crown. Because law brings no new element into our humanity, its appeal to our humanity has little more effect than that of the wind whistling through an archway. It appeals to conscience and reason by a plain declaration of what is right; to will and understanding by an exhibition of authority; to fears and prudence by plainly setting forth consequences. But what is to be done with men who know what is right but have no wish to do it, who believe that they ought but will not, who know the consequences but 'choose rather the pleasures of sin for a season,' and shuffle the future out of their minds altogether? This is the essential weakness of all law. The tyrant is not afraid so long as there is no one threatening his reign, but the unarmed herald of a discrowned king. His citadel will not surrender to the blast of the trumpet blown from Sinai.

II. Christ's condemnation and casting out of the tyrant.

The Apostle points to a triple condemnation.

'In the likeness of sinful flesh,' Jesus condemns sin by His own perfect life. That phrase, 'the likeness of the flesh of sin,' implies the real humanity of Jesus, and His perfect sinlessness; and suggests the first way in which He condemns sin in the flesh. In His life He repeats the law in a higher fashion. What the one spoke in words the other realised in 'loveliness of perfect deeds'; and all men own that example is the mightiest preacher of righteousness, and that active goodness draws to itself reverence and sways men to imitate. But that life lived in human nature gives a new hope of the possibilities of that nature even in us. The dream of perfect beauty 'in the flesh' has been realised. What the Man Christ Jesus was, He was that we may become. In the very flesh in which the tyrant rules, Jesus shows the possibility and the loveliness of a holy life.

But this, much as it is, is not all. There is another way in which Christ condemns sin in the flesh, and that is by His perfect sacrifice. To this also Paul points in the phrase, 'the flesh of sin.' The example of which we have been speaking is much, but it is weak for the very same reason for which law is weak—that it operates only through our nature as it is; and that is not enough. Sin's hold on man is twofold—one that it has perverted his relation to God, and another that it has corrupted his nature. Hence there is in him a sense of separation from God and a sense of guilt. Both of these not only lead to misery, but positively tend to strengthen the dominion of sin. The leader of the mutineers keeps them true to him by remind-ing them that the mutiny laws decree death without mercy. Guilt felt may drive to desperation and hopeless continuance in wrong. The cry, 'I am so bad that it is useless to try to be better,' is often heard. Guilt stifled leads to hardening of heart, and sometimes to desire and riot. Guilt slurred over by some easy process of absolution may lead to further sin. Similarly separation from God is the root of all evil, and thoughts of Him as hard and an enemy, always lead to sin. So if the power of sin in the past must be cancelled, the sense of guilt must be removed, and the wall of partition between man and God thrown down. What can law answer to such a demand? It is silent; it can only say, 'What is written is written.' It has no word to speak that promises 'the blotting out of the handwriting that is against us'; and through its silence one can hear the mocking laugh of the tyrant that keeps his castle.

But Christ has come 'for sin'; that is to say His Incarnation and Death had relation to, and had it for their object to remove, human sin. He comes to blot out the evil, to bring God's pardon. The recognition of His sacrifice supplies the adequate motive to copy His example, and they who see in His death God's sacrifice for man's sin, cannot but yield themselves to Him, and find in obedience a delight. Love kindled at His love makes likeness and transmutes the outward law into an inward 'spirit of life in Christ Jesus.'

Still another way by which God 'condemns sin in the flesh' is pointed to by the remaining phrase of our text, 'sending His own Son.' In the beginning of this epistle Jesus is spoken of as 'being declared to be the Son of God with power according to the

Spirit of holiness'; and we must connect that saying with our text, and so think of Christ's bestowal of His perfect gift to humanity of the Spirit which sanctifies as being part of His condemnation of sin in the flesh. Into the very region where the tyrant rules, the Son of God communicates a new nature which constitutes a real new power. The Spirit operates on all our faculties, and redeems them from the bondage of corruption. All the springs in the land are poisoned; but a new one, limpid and pure, is opened. By the entrance of the Spirit of holiness into a human spirit, the usurper is driven from the central fortress: and though he may linger in the outworks and keep up a guerilla warfare, that is all that he can do. We never truly apprehend Christ's gift to man until we recognise that He not merely 'died for our sins,' but lives to impart the principle of holiness in the gift of His Spirit. The dominion of that imparted Spirit is gradual and progressive. The Canaanite may still be in the land, but a growing power, working in and through us, is warring against all in us that still owns allegiance to that alien power, and there can be no end to the victorious struggle until the whole body, soul, and spirit, be wholly under the influence of the Spirit that dwelleth in us, and nothing shall hurt or destroy in what shall then be all God's holy mountain.

Such is, in the most general terms, the statement of what Christ does 'for us'; and the question comes to be the all-important one for each, Do I let Him do it for me? Remember the alternative. There must either be condemnation for us, or for the sin that dwelleth in us. There is no condemnation for them who are in Christ Jesus, because there is condemnation for the sin that dwells in them. It must be slain, or it will slay us. It must be cast out, or it will cast us out from God. It must be separated from us, or it will separate us from Him. We need not be condemned, but if it be not condemned, then we shall be.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.'—ROMANS viii. 16.

THE sin of the world is a false confidence, a careless, complacent taking for granted that a man is a Christian when he is not. The fault, and sorrow, and weakness of the Church is a false diffidence, an anxious fear whether a man be a Christian when he is. There are none so far away from false confidence as those who tremble lest they be cherishing it. There are none so inextricably caught in its toils as those who are all unconscious of *its* existence and of *their* danger. The two things, the false confidence and the false diffidence, are perhaps more akin to one another than they look at first sight. Their opposites, at all events—the true confidence, which is faith in Christ; and the true diffidence, which is utter distrust of myself—are identical. But there may sometimes be, and there often is, the combination of a real confidence and a false diffidence, the presence of faith, and the doubt whether it be present. Many Christians go through life with this as the prevailing temper of their minds—a doubt sometimes arising almost to agony, and sometimes dying down into passive patient acceptance of the condition as inevitable—a doubt whether, after all, they be not, as they say, 'deceiving themselves'; and in the perverse ingenuity with which that state of mind is constantly marked, they manage to distil for themselves a bitter vinegar of self-accusation out of grand words in the Bible, that were meant to afford them but the wine of gladness and of consolation.

Now this great text which I have ventured to take—not with the idea that I can exalt it or say anything worthy of it, but simply in the hope of clearing away some misapprehensions—is one that has often and often tortured the mind of Christians. They say of themselves, 'I know nothing of any such evidence: I am not conscious of any Spirit bearing witness with my spirit.' Instead of looking to other sources to answer the question whether they are Christians or not—and then, having answered it, thinking thus, 'That text asserts that *all* Christians have this witness, therefore certainly I have it in some shape or other,' they say to themselves, 'I do not feel anything that corresponds with my idea of what such a grand, supernatural voice as the witness of God's Spirit in my spirit must needs be; and therefore I doubt whether I am a Christian at all.' I should be thankful if the attempt I make now to set before you what seems to me to be the true teaching of the passage, should be, with God's help, the means of lifting some little part of the burden from some hearts that are right, and that only long to know that they are, in order to be at rest.

'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' The general course of thought which I wish to leave with you may be summed up thus: Our cry 'Father' is the witness that we are sons. That cry is not simply ours, but it is the voice of God's Spirit. The divine Witness in our spirits is subject to the ordinary influences which affect our spirits

Let us take these three thoughts, and dwell on them for a little while.

I. Our cry 'Father' is the witness that we are sons.

Mark the terms of the passage: 'The Spirit itself beareth witness *with* our spirit—.' It is not so much a revelation made to my spirit, considered as the recipient of the testimony, as a revelation made in or with my spirit considered as co-operating in the testimony. It is not that my spirit says one thing, bears witness that I am a child of God; and that the Spirit of God comes in by a distinguishable process, with a separate evidence, to say Amen to my persuasion; but it is that there is one testimony which has a conjoint origin—the origin from the Spirit of God as true source, and the origin from my own soul as recipient and co-operant in that testimony. From the teaching of this passage, or from any of the language which Scripture uses with regard to the inner witness, it is not to be inferred that there will rise up in a Christian's heart, from some origin consciously beyond the sphere of his own nature, a voice with which he has nothing to do; which at once, by its own character, by something peculiar and distinguishable about it, by something strange in its nature, or out of the ordinary course of human thinking, shall certify itself to be not *his* voice at all, but *God's* voice. That is not the direction in which you are to look for the witness of God's Spirit. It is evidence borne, indeed, by the Spirit of God; but it is evidence borne not only to our spirit, but through it, with it. The testimony is one, the testimony of a man's own emotion, and own conviction, and own desire, the cry, Abba, Father! So far, then, as the form of the evidence goes, you are not to look for it in anything ecstatic, arbitrary, parted off from your own experience by a broad line of demarcation; but you are to look into the experience which at first sight you would claim most exclusively for your own, and to try and find out whether *there* there be not working with your soul, working through it, working beneath it, distinct from it but not distinguishable from it by anything but its consequences and its fruitfulness—a deeper voice than yours—a 'still small voice,' —no whirlwind, nor fire, nor earthquake—but the voice of God speaking in secret, taking the voice and tones of your own heart and your own consciousness, and saying to you, 'Thou art my child, inasmuch as, operated by My grace, and Mine inspiration alone, there rises, tremblingly but truly, in thine own soul the cry, Abba, Father.'

So much, then, for the form of this evidence—my own conviction. Then with regard to the substance of it: conviction of what? The text itself does not tell us what is the evidence which the Spirit bears, and by reason of which we have a right to conclude that we are the children of God. The previous verse tells us. I have partially anticipated what I have to say on that point, but it will bear a little further expansion. 'Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father.' 'The Spirit itself,' by this means of our cry, Abba, Father, 'beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' The substance, then, of the conviction which is lodged in the human spirit by the testimony of the Spirit of God is not primarily directed to our relation or feelings to God, but to a far grander thing than that—to God's feelings and relation to us. Now I want you to think for one moment, before I pass on, how entirely different the whole aspect of this witness of the Spirit of which Christian men speak so much, and sometimes with so little understanding, becomes according as you regard it mistakenly as being the direct testimony to you that you are a child of God, or rightly as being the direct testimony to you that God is your Father. The two things seem to be the same, but they are not. In the one case, the false case, the mistaken interpretation, we are left to this, that a man has no deeper certainty of his condition, no better foundation for his hope, than what is to be drawn from the presence or absence of certain emotions within his own heart. In the other case, we are admitted into this 'wide place,' that all which is our own is second and not first, and that the true basis of all our confidence lies not in the thought of what we are and feel to God, but in the thought of what God is and feels to us. And instead, therefore, of being left to labour for ourselves, painfully to search amongst the dust and rubbish of our own hearts, we are taught to sweep away all that crumbled, rotten surface, and to go down to the living rock that lies beneath it; we are taught to say, in the words of the book of Isaiah, 'Doubtless Thou art our Father—we are all an unclean thing; our iniquities, like the wind, have carried us away'; there is nothing stable in us; our own resolutions, they are swept away like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor, by the first gust of temptation; but what of that?—'in those is continuance, and we shall be saved!' Ah, brethren! expand this thought of the conviction that God is my Father, as being the basis of all my confidence that I am His child, into its widest and grandest form, and it leads us up to the blessed old conviction, I am nothing, my holiness is nothing, my resolutions are nothing, my faith is nothing, my energies are nothing; I stand stripped, and barren, and naked of everything, and I fling myself out of myself into the merciful arms of my Father in heaven! There is all the difference in the world between searching for evidence of my sonship, and seeking to get the conviction of God's Fatherhood. The one is an endless, profitless, self-tormenting task; the other is the light and liberty, the glorious liberty, of the children of God.

And so the *substance* of the Spirit's evidence is the direct conviction based on the revelation of God's infinite love and fatherhood in Christ the Son, that God is my Father; from which direct conviction I come to the conclusion, the inference, the second thought, Then I may trust that I am His son. But why? Because of anything in me? No: because of Him. The very emblem of fatherhood and sonship might teach us that *that* depends upon the Father's will and the Father's heart. The Spirit's testimony has for form my own conviction: and for substance my humble cry, 'Oh Thou, my Father in heaven!' Brethren, is not that a far truer and nobler kind of thing to preach than saying, Look into your own heart for strange, extraordinary, distinguishable signs which shall mark you out as God's child—and which are proved to be His Spirit's, because they are separated from the ordinary human consciousness? Is it not far more blessed for us, and more honouring to Him who works the sign, when we say, that it is to be found in no out-of-rule, miraculous evidence, but in the natural (which is in reality supernatural) working of His Spirit in the heart which is its recipient, breeding there the conviction that God is my Father? And oh, if I am speaking to any to whom that text, with all its light and glory, has seemed to lift them up into an atmosphere too rare and a height too lofty for their heavy wings and unused feet, if I am speaking to any Christian man to whom this word has been like the cherubim and flaming sword, bright and beautiful, but threatening and repellent when it speaks of a Spirit that bears witness with our spirit—I ask you simply to take the passage for yourself, and carefully and patiently to examine it, and see if it be not true what I have been saying, that your trembling conviction—sister and akin as it is to your deepest distrust and sharpest sense of sin and unworthiness—that your trembling conviction of a love mightier than your own, everlasting and all-faithful, is indeed the selectest sign that God can give you that you *are* His child. Oh, brethren and sisters! be confident; for it is not false confidence: be confident if up from the depths of that dark well of your own sinful heart there rises sometimes, through all the bitter waters, unpolluted and separate, a sweet conviction, forcing itself upward, that God hath love in His heart, and that God is *my* Father. Be confident; 'the Spirit itself beareth witness with your spirit.'

II. And now, secondly, That cry is not simply ours, but it is the voice of God's Spirit.

Our own convictions are ours because they are God's. Our own souls possess these emotions of love and tender desire going out to God—our own spirits possess them; but our own spirits did not originate them. They are ours by property; they are His by source. The spirit of a Christian man has no good thought in it, no true thought, no perception of the grace of God's Gospel, no holy desire, no pure resolution, which is not stamped with the sign of a higher origin, and is not the witness of God's

Spirit in his spirit. The passage before us tells us that the sense of Fatherhood which is in the Christian's heart, and becomes his cry, comes from God's Spirit. This passage, and that in the Epistle to the Galatians which is almost parallel, put this truth very forcibly, when taken in connection. 'Ye have received,' says the text before us, 'the Spirit of adoption, whereby *we* cry, Abba, Father.' The variation in the Epistle to the Galatians is this: 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, *crying* (the Spirit crying), Abba, Father.' So in the one text, the cry is regarded as the voice of the believing heart; and in the other the same cry is regarded as the voice of God's Spirit. And these two things are both true; the one would want its foundation if it were not for the other; the cry of the Spirit is nothing for me unless it be appropriated by me. I do not need to plunge here into metaphysical speculation of any sort, but simply to dwell upon the plain practical teaching of the Bible—a teaching verified, I believe, by every Christian's experience, if he will search into it—that everything in him which makes the Christian life, is not his, but is God's by origin, and his only by gift and inspiration. And the whole doctrine of my text is built on this one thought—without the Spirit of God in your heart, you never can recognise God as your Father. That in us which runs, with love, and childlike faith, and reverence, to the place 'where His honour dwelleth,' that in us which says 'Father,' is kindred with God, and is not the simple, unhelped, unsanctified human nature. There is no ascent of human desires above their source. And wherever in a heart there springs up heavenward a thought, a wish, a prayer, a trembling confidence, it is because that came down first from heaven, and rises to seek its level again. All that is divine in man comes from God. All that tends towards God in man is God's voice in the human heart; and were it not for the possession and operation, the sanctifying and quickening, of a living divine Spirit granted to us, our souls would for ever cleave to the dust and dwell upon earth, nor ever rise to God and live in the light of His presence. Every Christian, then, may be sure of this, that howsoever feeble may be the thought and conviction in his heart of God's Fatherhood, *he* did not work it, he received it only, cherished it, thought of it, watched over it, was careful not to quench it; but in origin it was God's, and it is now and ever the voice of the Divine Spirit in the child's heart.

But, my friends, if this principle be true, it does not apply only to this one single attitude of the believing soul when it cries, Abba, Father; it must be widened out to comprehend the whole of a Christian's life, outward and inward, which is not sinful and darkened with actual transgression. To all the rest of his being, to everything in heart and life which is right and pure, the same truth applies. 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit' in every perception of God's word which is granted, in every revelation of His counsel which dawns upon our darkness, in every aspiration after Him which lifts us above the smoke and dust of this dim spot, in every holy resolution, in every thrill and throb of love and desire. Each of these is mine—inasmuch as in my heart it is experienced and transacted; it is mine, inasmuch as I am not a mere dead piece of matter, the passive recipient of a magical and supernatural grace; but it is God's; and therefore, and therefore only, has it come to be mine!

And if it be objected, that this opens a wide door to all manner of delusion, and that there is no more dangerous thing than for a man to confound his own thoughts with the operations of God's Spirit, let me just give you (following the context before us) the one guarantee and test which the Apostle lays down. He says, 'There is a witness from God in your spirits.' You may say, That witness, if it come in the form of these convictions in my own heart, I may mistake and falsely read. Well, then, here is an outward guarantee. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God'; and so, on the regions both of heart and of life the consecrating thought,—God's work, and God's Spirit's work—is stamped. The heart with its love, the head with its understanding, the conscience with its quick response to the law of duty, the will with its resolutions,—these are all, as sanctified by Him, the witness of His Spirit; and the life with its strenuous obedience, with its struggles against sin and temptation, with its patient persistence in the quiet path of ordinary duty, as well as with the times when it rises into heroic stature of resignation or allegiance, the martyrdom of death and the martyrdom of life, this too is all (in so far as it is pure and right) the work of that same Spirit. The test of the inward conviction is the outward life; and they that have the witness of the Spirit within them have the light of their life lit by the Spirit of God, whereby they may read the handwriting on the heart, and be sure that it is God's and not their own.

III. And now, lastly, this divine Witness in our spirits is subject to the ordinary influences which affect our spirits.

The notion often prevails that if there be in the heart this divine witness of God's Spirit, it must needs be perfect, clearly indicating its origin by an exemption from all that besets ordinary human feelings, that it must be a strong, uniform, never flickering, never darkening, and perpetual light, a kind of vestal fire burning always on the altar of the heart! The passage before us, and all others that speak about the matter, give us the directly opposite notion. The Divine Spirit, when it enters into the narrow room of the human spirit, condescends to submit itself, not wholly, but to such an extent as practically for our present purpose *is* wholly to submit itself to the ordinary laws and conditions and contingencies which befall and regulate our own human nature. Christ came into the world divine: He was 'found in fashion as a man,' in form a servant; the humanity that He wore limited (if you like), regulated, modified, the manifestation of the divinity that dwelt in it. And not otherwise is the operation of God's Holy Spirit when it comes to dwell in a human heart. There too, working through man, *it* 'is found in fashion as a man'; and though the origin of the conviction be of God, and though the voice in my heart be not only my voice, but God's voice there, it will obey those same laws which make human thoughts and emotions vary, and fluctuate, flicker and flame up again, burn bright and burn low, according to a thousand circumstances. The witness of the Spirit, if it were yonder in heaven, would shine like a perpetual star; the witness of the Spirit, here in the heart on earth, burns like a flickering flame, never to be extinguished, but still not always bright, wanting to be trimmed, and needing to be guarded from rude blasts. Else, brother, what does an Apostle mean when he says to you and me, 'Quench not the Spirit'? what does he mean when he says to us, 'Grieve not the Spirit'? What does the whole teaching which enjoins on us, 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning,' and 'What I say to you, I say to all, Watch!' mean, unless it means this, that God-given as (God be thanked!) that conviction of Fatherhood is, it is not given in such a way as that, irrespective of our carefulness, irrespective of our watching, it shall burn on—the same and unchangeable? The Spirit's witness comes from God, therefore it is veracious, divine, omnipotent; but the Spirit's witness from God is in man, therefore it may be wrongly read, it may be checked, it may for a time be kept down, and prevented from showing itself to be what it is.

And the practical conclusion that comes from all this, is just the simple advice to you all: Do not wonder, in the first place, if that evidence of which we speak, vary and change in its clearness and force in your own hearts. 'The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.' Do not think that it cannot be genuine, because it is changeful. There is a sun in the heavens, but there are heavenly lights too that wax and wane; they *are* lights, they *are* in the heavens though they change. You have no reason, Christian man, to be discouraged, cast down, still less despondent, because you find that the witness of the Spirit changes and varies in your heart. Do not despond because it does; watch it, and guard it, lest it do; live in the contemplation of the Person and the fact that calls it forth, that it may not. You will never 'brighten your evidences' by polishing at them. To polish the mirror ever so assiduously does not secure the image of the sun on its surface. The only way to do that is to carry the poor bit of glass out into the sunshine. It will shine then, never fear. It is weary work to labour at self-improvement with the hope of drawing from our own characters evidences that we are the sons of God. To have the heart filled with the light of Christ's love to us is the only way to have the whole being full of light. If you would have clear and irrefragable, for a perpetual joy, a glory and a defence, the unwavering confidence, 'I am Thy child,' go to God's throne, and lie down at the foot of it, and let the first thought be, 'My Father in heaven,' and *that* will brighten, that will stablish, that will make omnipotent in your life the witness of the Spirit that you are the child of God.

SONS AND HEIRS

'If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.'
ROMANS viii. 17.

GOD Himself is His greatest gift. The loftiest blessing which we can receive is that we should be heirs, possessors of God. There is a sublime and wonderful mutual possession of which Scripture speaks much wherein the Lord is the inheritance of Israel, and Israel is the inheritance of the Lord. 'The Lord hath taken you to be to Him a people of inheritance,' says Moses; 'Ye are a people for a possession,' says Peter. And, on the other hand, 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance,' says David; 'Ye are heirs of God,' echoes Paul. On earth and in heaven the heritage of the children of the Lord is God Himself, inasmuch as He is with them for their delight, in them to make them partakers of the divine nature,' and for them in all His attributes and actions.

This being clearly understood at the outset, we shall be prepared to follow the Apostle's course of thought while he points out the conditions upon which the possession of that inheritance depends. It is children of God who are heirs of God. It is by union with Christ Jesus, the Son, to whom the inheritance belongs, that they who believe on His name receive power to become the sons of God, and with that power the possession of the inheritance. Thus, then, in this condensed utterance of the text there appear a series of thoughts which may perhaps be more fully unfolded in some such manner as the following, that there is no inheritance without sonship, that there is no sonship without a spiritual birth, that there is no spiritual birth without Christ, and that there is no Christ for us without faith.

I. First, then, the text tells us, no inheritance without sonship.

In general terms, spiritual blessings can only be given to those who are in a certain spiritual condition. Always and necessarily the capacity or organ of reception precedes and determines the bestowment of blessings. The light falls everywhere, but only the eye drinks it in. The lower orders of creatures are shut out from all participation in the gifts which belong to the higher forms of life, simply because they are so made and organised as that these cannot find entrance into their nature. They are, as it were, walled up all round; and the only door they have to communicate with the outer world is the door of sense. Man has higher gifts simply because he has higher capacities. All creatures are plunged in the same boundless ocean of divine beneficence and bestowment, and into each there flows just that, and no more, which each, by the make and constitution that God has given it, is capable of receiving. In the man there are more windows and doors opened out than in the animal. He is capable of receiving intellectual impulses, spiritual emotions; he can think, and feel, and desire, and will, and resolve: and so he stands on a higher level than the beast below him.

Not otherwise is it in regard to God's kingdom, 'which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' The gift and blessing of salvation is primarily a spiritual gift, and only involves outward consequences secondarily and subordinately. It mainly consists in the heart being at peace with God, in the whole soul being filled with divine affections, in the weight and bondage of transgression being taken away, and substituted by the impulse and the life of the new love. Therefore, neither God can give, nor man can receive, that gift upon any other terms, than just this, that the heart and nature be fitted and adapted for it. Spiritual blessings require a spiritual capacity for the reception of them; or, as my text says, you cannot have the inheritance unless you are sons. If salvation consisted simply in a change of place; if it were merely that by some expedient or arrangement, an outward penalty, which was to fall or not to fall at the will of an arbitrary judge, were prevented from coming down, why then, it would be open to Him who held the power of letting the sword fall, to decide on what terms He might choose to suspend its infliction. But inasmuch as God's deliverance is not a deliverance from a mere arbitrary and outward punishment: inasmuch as God's salvation, though it be deliverance from the penalty as well as from the guilt of sin, is by no means chiefly a deliverance from outward consequences, but mainly a removal of the nature and disposition that makes these outward consequences certain,—therefore a man cannot be saved, God's love cannot save him, God's justice will not save him, God's power stands back from saving him, upon any other condition than this that his soul shall be adapted and prepared for the reception and enjoyment of the blessing of a spiritual salvation.

But the inheritance which my text speaks about is also that which a Christian hopes to receive and enter upon in heaven. The same principle precisely applies there. There is no inheritance of heaven without sonship; because all the blessings of that future life are of a spiritual character. The joy and the rapture and the glory of that higher and better life have, of course, connected with them certain changes of bodily form, certain changes of local dwelling, certain changes which could perhaps be granted equally to a man, of whatever sort he was. But, friends, it is not the golden harps, not the pavement of 'glass mingled with fire,' not the cessation from work, not the still composure, and changeless indwelling, not the society even, that makes the heaven of heaven. All these are but the embodiments and rendering visible of the inward facts, a soul at peace with God in the depths of its being, an eye which gazes upon the Father, and a heart which wraps itself in His arms. Heaven is no heaven except in so far as it is the possession of God. That saying of the Psalmist is not an exaggeration, nor even a forgetting of the other elements of future blessedness, but it is a simple statement of the literal fact of the case, 'I have none in heaven but Thee!' God is the heritage of His people. To dwell in His love, and to be filled with His light, and to walk for ever in the glory of His sunlit face, to do His will, and to bear His character stamped upon our foreheads—*that* is the glory and the perfectness to which we are aspiring. Do not then rest in the symbols that show us, darkly and far off, what that future glory is. Do not forget that the picture is a shadow. Get beneath all these figurative expressions, and feel that whilst it may be true that for us in our present earthly state, there can be no higher, no purer, no more spiritual nor any truer representations of the blessedness which is to come, than those which couch it in the forms of earthly experience, and appeal to sense as the minister of delight—yet that all these things are *re*presentations, and not adequate presentations. The inheritance of the servants of the Lord is the Lord Himself, and they dwell in Him, and *there* is their joy.

Well then, if that be even partially true—admitting all that you may say about circumstances which go to make some portion of the blessedness of that future life—if it be true that God is the true blessing given by His Gospel upon earth, that He Himself is the greatest gift that can be bestowed, and that He is the true Heaven of heaven—what a flood of light does it cast upon that statement of my text, 'If children, then heirs'; no inheritance without sonship! For who can possess God but they who love Him? who can love, but they who know His love? who can have Him working in their hearts a blessed and sanctifying change, except the souls that lie thankfully quiet beneath the forming touch of His invisible hand, and like flowers drink in the light of His face in their still joy? How can God dwell in any heart except a heart which has in it a love of purity? Where can He make His temple except in the 'upright heart and pure'? How can there be fellowship betwixt Him and any one except the man who is a son because he hath received of the divine nature, and in whom that divine nature is growing up into a divine likeness? 'What fellowship hath Christ with Belial?' is not only applicable as a guide for our practical life, but points to the principle on which God's inheritance belongs to God's sons alone. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'; and those only who love, and are children, to them alone does the Father come and does the Father belong.

So much, then, for the first principle: No inheritance without sonship.

II. Secondly, the text leads us to the principle that there is no sonship without a spiritual birth.

The Apostle John in that most wonderful preface to his Gospel, where all deepest truths concerning the Eternal Being in itself and in the solemn march of His progressive revelations to the world are set forth in language simple like the words of a child and inexhaustible like the voice of a god, draws a broad distinction between the relation to the manifestations of God which every human soul by virtue of his humanity sustains, and that into which some, by virtue of their faith, enter. Every man is lighted by the true light because he is a man. They who believe in His name receive from Him the prerogative to become the sons of God. Whatever else may be taught in John's words, surely they do teach us this, that the sonship of which he speaks does not belong to man as man, is not a relation into which we are born by natural birth, that we *become* sons after we *are* men, that those who become sons do not include all those who are lighted by the Light, but consist of so many of that greater number as receive Him, and that such become sons by a divine act, the communication of a spiritual life, whereby they are born of God.

The same Apostle, in his Epistles, where the widest love is conjoined with the most firmly drawn lines of moral demarcation between the great opposites—life, light, love—death, darkness, hate—contrasts in the most unmistakable antithesis the sons of God who are known for such because they do righteousness, and the world which knew not Christ, nor knows those who, dimly beholding, partially resemble Him. Nay, he goes further, and says in strange contradiction to the popular estimate of his character, but in true imitation of that Incarnate love which hated iniquity, 'In this the children of God are manifested and the children of the devil'—echoing thus the words of Him whose pitying tenderness had sometimes to clothe itself in sharpest words, even as His hand of powerful love had once to grasp the scourge of small cords. 'If God were your Father, ye would love Me: ye are of your father, the devil.'

These are but specimens of a whole cycle of Scripture statements which in every form of necessary implication, and of direct statement, set forth the principle that he who is born again of the Spirit, and he only, is a son of God.

Nothing in all this contradicts the belief that all men are the children of God, inasmuch as they are shaped by His divine hand and He has breathed into their nostrils the breath of life. They who hold that sonship is obtained on the condition which these passages seem to assert, do also rejoice to believe and to preach that the Father's love broods over every human heart as the dovelike Spirit over the primeval chaos. They rejoice to proclaim that Christ has come that all, that each, may receive the adoption of sons. They do not feel that their message to, nor their hope for, the world is less blessed, less wide, because while they call on all to come and take the things that are freely given to them of God, they believe that those only who do come and take possess the blessing. Every man may become a son and heir of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

But notwithstanding all the mercies that belong to us all, notwithstanding the divine beneficence, which, like the air and the light, pervades all nature, and underlies all our lives, notwithstanding the universal adaptation and intention of Christ's work, notwithstanding the wooing of His tender voice and the unceasing beckoning of His love, it still remains true that there are men in the world, created by God, loved and cared for by Him, for whom Christ died, who might be, but are not, sons of God.

Fatherhood! what does that word itself teach us? It speaks of the communication of a life, and the reciprocity of love. It rests upon a divine act, and it involves a human emotion. It involves that the father and the child shall have kindred life—the father bestowing and the child possessing a life which is derived; and because derived, kindred; and because kindred, unfolding itself in likeness to the father that gave it. And it requires that between the father's heart and the child's heart there shall pass, in blessed interchange and quick correspondence, answering love, flashing backwards and forwards, like the lightning that touches the earth and rises from it again. A simple appeal to your own consciousness will decide if that be the condition of all men. Are you, my brother, conscious of anything within you higher than the common life that belongs to you because you are an immortal soul? Can you say, 'From God's hand I have received the granting and implantation of a new and better life?' Is your claim verified by this, that you are kindred with God in holy affections, in like purposes, loving what He loves, hating what He hates, doing what He wills, accepting what He sends, longing for Himself, and blessed in His presence? Is your sonship proved by the depth and sincerity, the simplicity and power, of your throbbing heart of love to your Father in heaven? Or are all these emotions empty words to you, things that are spoken in pulpits, but to which you have nothing in your life corresponding? Oh then, my friend, what am I to say to you? What but this? no sonship except by that spiritual birth; and if not such sonship, then the spirit of bondage. If not such sonship, why then, by all the tendencies of your nature, and by all the affinities of your moral being, if you are not holding of heaven, you are holding of hell; if you are not drawing your life, your character, your emotions, your affections, from the sacred well that lies up yonder, you are drawing them from the black one that lies down there. There are heaven, hell, and the earth that lies between, ever influenced either from above or from below. You are sons because born again, or slaves and 'enemies by wicked works.' It is a grim alternative, but it is a fact.

III. Thirdly, no spiritual birth without Christ.

We have seen that the sonship which gives power of possessing the inheritance and which comes by spiritual birth, rests upon the giving of life, spiritual life, from God; and unfolds itself in certain holy characters, and affections, and desires, the throbbing of the whole soul in full accord and harmony with the divine character and will. Well then, it looks very clear that a man cannot make that new life for himself, cannot do it because of the habit of sin, and cannot do it because of the guilt and punishment of sin. If for sonship there must be a birth again, why, surely, the very symbol might convince you that such a process does not lie within our own power. There must come down a divine leaven into the mass of human nature, before this new being can be evolved in any one. There must be a gift of God. A divine energy must be the source and fountain of all holy and of all Godlike life. Christ comes, comes to make you and me live again as we never lived before; live possessors of God's love; live tenanted and ruled by a divine Spirit; live with affections in our hearts which *we* never could kindle there; live with purposes in our souls which *we* never could put there.

And I want to urge this thought, that the centre point of the Gospel is this regeneration; because if we understand, as we are too much disposed to do, that the Gospel simply comes to make men live better, to work out a moral reformation,—why, there is no need for a Gospel at all. If the change were a simple change of habit and action on the part of men, we could do without a Christ. If the change simply involved a bracing ourselves up to behave better for the future, we could manage somehow or other about as well as or better than we have managed in the past. But if redemption be the giving of life from God; and if redemption be the change of position in reference to God's love and God's law as well, neither of these two changes can a man effect for himself. You cannot gather up the spilt water; you cannot any more gather up and re-issue the past life. The sin remains, the guilt remains. The inevitable law of God will g on its crashing way in spite of all penitence, in spite of all reformation, in spite of all desires after newness of life. There is but one Being who can make a change in our position in regard to God, and there is but one Being who can make the change by which man shall become a 'new creature.' The Creative Spirit that shaped the earth must shape its new being in my soul; and the Father against whose law I have offended, whose love I have slighted, from whom I have turned away, must effect the alteration that I can never effect—the alteration in my position to His judgments and justice, and to the whole sweep of His government. No new birth without Christ; no escape from the old standing-place, of being 'enemies to God by wicked works,' by anything that we can do: no hope of the inheritance unless the Lord and the Man, the 'second Adam from heaven,' have come! He *has* come, and He has 'dwelt with us,' and He has worn this life of ours, and He has walked in the midst of this world, and He knows all about our human condition, and He has effected an actual change in the possible aspect of the divine justice and government to us; and He has carried in the golden urn of His humanity a new spirit and a new life which He has set down in the midst of the race; and the urn was broken on the cross of Calvary, and the water flowed out, and whithersoever that water comes there is life, and whithersoever it comes not there is death!

IV. Last of all, no Christ without faith.

It is not enough, brethren, that we should go through all these previous steps, if we then go utterly astray at the end, by forgetting that there is only one way by which we become partakers of any of the benefits and blessings that Christ has wrought out. It is much to say that for inheritance there must be sonship. It is much to say that for sonship there must be a divine regeneration. It is much to say that the power of this regeneration is all gathered together in Christ Jesus. But there are plenty of people that would agree to all that, who go off at that point, and content themselves with *this* kind of thinking—that in some vague mysterious way, they know not how, in a sort of half-magical manner, the benefit of Christ's death and work comes to all in Christian lands, whether there be an act of faith or not! Now I am not going to talk theology at present, at this stage of my sermon; but what I want to leave upon all your hearts is this profound conviction,—Unless we are wedded to Jesus Christ by the simple act of trust in His mercy and His power, Christ is nothing to us. Do not let us, my friends, blink that deciding test of the whole matter. We may talk about Christ for ever; we may set forth aspects of His work, great and glorious. He may be to us much that is very precious; but the one question, the question of questions, on which everything else depends, is, Am I trusting to Him as my divine Redeemer? am I resting in Him as the Son of God? Some of us here now have a sort of nominal connection with Christ, who have a kind of imaginative connection with Him; traditional, ceremonial, by habit of thought, by attendance on public worship, and by I know not what other means. Ceremonies are nothing, notions are nothing, beliefs are nothing, formal participation in worship is nothing. Christ is everything to him that trusts Him. Christ is nothing but a judge and a condemnation to him who trusts Him not. And here is the turning-point, Am I resting upon that Lord for my salvation? If so, you can begin upon that step.

the low one on which you can put your foot, the humble act of faith, and with the foot there, can climb up. If faith, then new birth; if new birth, then sonship; if sonship, then 'an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ.' But if you have not got your foot upon the lowest round of the ladder, you will never come within sight of the blessed face of Him who stands at the top of it, and who looks down to you at this moment, saying to you, 'My child, *wilt* thou not cry unto Me "Abba, Father?"'

SUFFERING WITH CHRIST, A CONDITION OF GLORY WITH CHRIST

'. . . Joint heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.'—ROMANS viii. 17.

In the former part of this verse the Apostle tells us that in order to be heirs of God, we must become sons through and joint-heirs with Christ. He seems at first sight to add in these words of our text another condition to those already specified, namely, that of suffering with Christ.

Now, of course, whatever may be the operation of suffering in fitting for the possession of the Christian inheritance, either here or in another world, the sonship and the sorrows do not stand on the same level in regard to that possession. The one is the indispensable condition of all; the other is but the means for the operation of the condition. The one—being sons, 'joint-heirs with Christ,'—is the root of the whole matter; the other—the 'suffering with Him,'—is but the various process by which from the root there come 'the blade, and the ear, and the full corn in the ear.' Given the sonship—if it is to be worked out into power and beauty, there must be suffering with Christ. But unless there be sonship, there is no possibility of inheriting God; discipline and suffering will be of no use at all.

The chief lesson which I wish to gather from this text now is that all God's sons must suffer with Christ; and in addition to this principle, we may complete our considerations by adding briefly, that the inheritance must be won by suffering, and that if we suffer with Him, we certainly shall receive the inheritance.

I. First, then, sonship with Christ necessarily involves suffering with Him.

I think that we entirely misapprehend the force of this passage before us, if we suppose it to refer principally or merely to the outward calamities, what you call trials and afflictions, which befall people, and see in it only the teaching, that the sorrows of daily life may have in them a sign of our being children of God, and some power to prepare us for the glory that is to come There is a great deal more in the thought than that, brethren. This is not merely a text for people who are in affliction, but for all of us. It does not merely contain a law for a certain part of life, but it contains a law for the whole of life. It is not merely a promise that in all our afflictions Christ will be afflicted, but it is a solemn injunction that we seek to know 'the fellowship of His sufferings, and be made conformable to the likeness of His death,' if we expect to be 'found in the likeness of His Resurrection,' and to have any share in the community of His glory. In other words, the foundation of it is not that Christ shares in our sufferings; but that we, as Christians, in a deep and real sense do necessarily share and participate in Christ's. We 'suffer with Him'; *not* He suffers with us.

Now, do not let us misunderstand each other, or the Apostle's teaching. Do not suppose that I am forgetting, or wishing you to account as of small importance, the awful sense in which Christ's suffering stands as a thing by itself and unapproachable, a solitary pillar rising up, above the waste of time, to which all men everywhere are to turn with the one thought, 'I can do nothing like that; I need to do nothing like it; it has been done once, and once for all; and what I have to do is, simply to lie down before Him, and let the power and the blessings of that death and those sufferings flow into my heart.' The Divine Redeemer makes eternal redemption. The sufferings of Christ—the sufferings of His life, and the sufferings of His death—both because of the nature which bore them, and of the aspect which they wore in regard to us, are in their source, in their intensity, in their character, and consequences, unapproachable, incapable of repetition, and needing no repetition whilst the world shall stand. But then, do not let us forget that the very books and writers in the New Testament that preach most broadly Christ's sole, all-sufficient, eternal redemption for the world by His sufferings and death, turn round and say to us too, '"Be planted together in the likeness of His death": you are "crucified to the world" by the Cross of Christ; you are to "fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ."' He Himself speaks of our drinking of the cup that He drank of, and being baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with, if we desire to sit yonder on His throne, and share with Him in His glory.

Now what do the Apostles, and what does Christ Himself, in that passage that I have quoted, mean, by such solemn words as these? Some people shrink from them, and say that it is trenching upon the central doctrine of the Gospel, when we speak about drinking of the cup which Christ drank of. They ask, Can it be? Yes, it can be, if you will think thus:—If a Christian has the Spirit and life of Christ in him, his career will be moulded, imperfectly but really, by the same Spirit that dwelt in his Lord; and similar causes will produce corresponding effects. The life of Christ which—divine, pure, incapable of copy and repetition—in one aspect has ended for ever for men, remains to be lived, in another view of it, by every Christian, who in like manner has to fight with the world; who in like manner has to resist temptation; who in like manner has to stand, by God's help, pure and sinless, in so far as the new nature of him is concerned, in the midst of a world that is full of evil. For were the sufferings of the Lord only the sufferings that were wrought upon Calvary? Were the sufferings of the Lord only the sufferings which came from the 'contradiction of sinners against Himself'? Were the sufferings of the Lord only the sufferings which were connected with His bodily afflictions and pain, precious and priceless as they were, and operative causes of our redemption as they were? Oh no. Conceive of that perfect, sinless, really human life, in the midst of a system of things that is all full of corruption and of sin; coming ever and anon against misery, and wrong-doing, and rebellion; and ask yourselves whether part of His sufferings did not spring from the contact of the sinless Son of man with a sinful world, and the apparently vain attempt to influence and leaven that sinful world with care for itself and love for the Father. If there had been nothing more than that, yet Christ's sufferings as the Son of God in the midst of sinful men would have been deep and real. 'O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?' was wrung from Him by the painful sense of want of sympathy between His aims and theirs. 'Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then I would fly away and be at rest,' must often be the language of those who are like Him in spirit, and in consequent sufferings.

And then again, another branch of the 'sufferings of Christ' is to be found in that deep and mysterious fact on which I durst not venture to speak beyond what the actual words of Scripture put into my lips—the fact that Christ wrought out His perfect obedience as a man, through temptation and by suffering. There was no sin *within* Him, no tendency to sin, no yielding to the evil that assailed. 'The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me.' But yet, when that dark Power stood by His side, and said, 'If thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down,' it was a real temptation and not a sham one. There was no wish to do it, no faltering for a moment, no hesitation. There was no rising up in that calm will of even a moment's impulse to do the thing that was presented;—but yet it was presented, and, when Christ triumphed, and the tempter departed for a season, there had been a temptation and there had been a conflict. And though obedience be a joy, and the doing of His Father's will was His delight, as it must needs be in pure and in purified hearts; yet obedience which is sustained in the face of temptation, and which never fails, though its path lead to bodily pains and the 'contradiction of sinners,' may well be called suffering. We cannot speak of our Lord's obedience as the surrender of His own will to the Father's, with the implication that these two wills ever did or could move except in harmony. There was no place in Christ's obedience for that casting out of sinful self which makes our submission a surrender joined with suffering, but He knew temptation. Flesh, and sense, and the world, and the prince of this world, presented it to Him; and therefore His obedience too was suffering, even though to do the will of His Father was His meat and His drink, His sustenance and His refreshment.

But then, let me remind you still further, that not only does the life of Christ, as sinless in the midst of sinful men, and the life of Christ, as sinless whilst yet there was temptation presented to it—assume the aspect of being a life of suffering, and become, in that respect, the model for us; but that also the Death of Christ, besides its aspect as an atonement and sacrifice for sin, the power by which transgression is put away and God's love flows out upon our souls, has another power given to it in the teaching of the New Testament. The Death of Christ is a type of the Christian's life, which is to be one long, protracted, and daily dying to sin, to self, to the world. The crucifixion of the old manhood is to be the life's work of every Christian, through the power of faith in that Cross by which 'the world is crucified unto Me, and I unto the world' That thought comes over and over again in all forms of earnest presentation in the Apostle's teaching. Do not slur it over as if it were a mere fanciful metaphor. It carries in its type a most solemn reality. The truth is, that, if a Christian you have a double life. There is Christ, with His power, with His Spirit, giving you a nature which is pure and sinless, incapable of transgression, like His own. The new man, that which is born of God, sinneth not, cannot sin. But side by side with it, working through it, working in it, leavening it, indistinguishable from it to your consciousness, by anything but this that the one works righteousness and the other works transgression, there is the 'old man,' 'the flesh,' 'the old Adam,' your own godless, independent, selfish, proud being. And the one is to slay the other! Ah, let me tell you, these words—crucifying, casting out the old man, plucking out the right eye, maiming self of the right hand, mortifying the deeds of the body—they are something very much deeper and more awful than poetical symbols and metaphors. They teach us this, that there is no growth without sore sorrow. Conflict, not progress, is the word that defines man's path from darkness into light. No holiness is won by any other means than this, that wickedness should be slain day by day, and hour by hour. In long lingering agony often, with the blood of the heart pouring out at every quivering vein, you are to cut right through the life and being of that sinful self; to do what the Word does, pierce to the dividing asunder of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and get rid by crucifying and slaying—a long process, a painful process—of your own sinful self. And not until you can stand up and say, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,' have you accomplished that to which you are consecrated and vowed by your sonship—'being conformed unto the likeness of His death,' and 'knowing the fellowship of His sufferings.'

It is this process, the inward strife and conflict in getting rid of evil, which the Apostle designates here with the name of 'suffering with Christ, that we may be also glorified together.' On this high level, and not upon the lower one of the consideration that Christ will help us to bear outward infirmities and afflictions, do we find the true meaning of all that Scripture teaching which says indeed, 'Yes, our sufferings are *His*'; but lays the foundation of it in this, 'His sufferings are *ours*.' It begins by telling us that Christ has done a work and borne a sorrow that no second can ever do. Then it tells us that Christ's life of obedience—which, because it *was* a life of obedience, was a life of suffering, and brought Him into a condition of hostility to the men around Him—is to be repeated in us. It sets before us the Cross of Calvary, and the sorrows and pains that were felt there;—and it says to us, Christian men and women, if you want the power for holy living, have fellowship in that atoning death; and if you want the pattern of holy living, look at that Cross and feel, 'I am crucified to the world by it; and the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.'

Such considerations as these, however, do not necessarily exclude the other one (which we may just mention and dwell on for a moment), namely, that where there is this spiritual participation in the sufferings of Christ, and where His death is reproduced and perpetuated, as it were, in our daily mortifying ourselves in the present evil world—there Christ is with us in our afflictions. God forbid that I should try to strike away any word of consolation that has come, as these words of my text have come, to so many sorrowing hearts in all generations, like music in the night and like cold waters to a thirsty soul. We need not hold that there is no reference here to that comforting thought, 'In all our affliction He is afflicted.' Brethren, you and I have, each of us—one in one way, and one in another, all in some way, all in the right way, none in too severe a way, none in too slight a way—to tread the path of sorrow; and is it not a blessed thing, as we go along through that dark valley of the shadow of death down into which the sunniest paths go sometimes, to come, amidst the twilight and the gathering clouds, upon tokens that Jesus has been on the road before us? They tell us that in some trackless lands, when one friend passes through the pathless forests, he breaks a twig ever and anon as he goes, that those who come after may see the traces of his having been there, and may know that they are not out of the road. Oh, when we are journeying through the murky night, and the dark woods of affliction and sorrow, it is something to find here and there a spray broken, or a leafy stem bent down with the tread of His foot and the brush of His hand as He passed, and to remember that the path He trod He has hallowed, and thus to find lingering fragrances and hidden strengths in the remembrance of Him as 'in all points tempted like as we are,' bearing grief *for* us, bearing grief *with* us, bearing grief *like* us.

Oh, do not, do not, my brethren, keep these sacred thoughts of Christ's companionship in sorrow, for the larger trials of life. If the mote in the eye be large enough to annoy you, it is large enough to bring out His sympathy; and if the grief be too small for Him to compassionate and share, it is too small for you to be troubled by it. If you are ashamed to apply that divine thought, 'Christ bears this grief with me,' to those petty molehills that you sometimes magnify into mountains, think to yourselves that then it is a shame for you to be stumbling over them. But on the other hand, never fear to be irreverent or too familiar in the thought that Christ is willing to bear, and help you to bear, the pettiest, the minutest, and most insignificant of the daily annoyances that may come to ruffle you. Whether it be a poison from one serpent sting, or whether it be poison from a million of buzzing tiny mosquitoes, if there be a smart, go to Him, and He will help you to endure it. He will do more, He will bear it with you, for if so be that we suffer with Him, He suffers with us, and our oneness with Christ brings about a community of possessions whereby it becomes true of each trusting soul in its relations to Him, that 'all mine (joys and sorrows alike) are thine, and all thine are mine.'

II. There remain some other considerations which may be briefly stated, in order to complete the lessons of this text. In the second place, this community of suffering is a necessary preparation for the community of glory.

I name this principally for the sake of putting in a caution. The Apostle does not mean to tell us, of course, that if there were such a case as that of a man becoming a son of God, and having no occasion or opportunity afterwards, by brevity of life or other causes, for passing through the discipline of sorrow, his inheritance would be forfeited. We must always take such passages as this—which seem to make the discipline of the world an essential part of the preparing of us for glory—in conjunction with the other undeniable truth which completes them, that when a man has the love of God in his heart, however feebly, however newly, there and then he is fit for the inheritance. I think that Christian people make vast mistakes sometimes in talking about 'being made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,' about being 'ripe for glory,' and the like. One thing at any rate is very certain, it is not the discipline that fits. That which fits goes before the discipline, and the discipline only develops the fitness. 'God hath made us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,' says the Apostle. That is a past act. The preparedness for heaven comes at the moment—if it be a momentary act—when a man turns to Christ. You may take the lowest and most abandoned form of human character, and in one moment (it is possible, and it is often the case) the entrance into that soul of the feeble germ of that new affection shall at once change the whole moral habitude of that man. Though it be true, then, that heaven is only open to those who are capable—by holy aspirations and divine desires—of entering into it, it is equally true that such aspirations and desires may be the work of an instant, and may be superinduced in a moment in a heart the most debased and the most degraded. 'This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise,'—*fit* for the inheritance!

And, therefore, let us not misunderstand such words as this text, and fancy that the necessary discipline, which we have to go through before we are ready for heaven, is necessary in anything like the same sense in which it is necessary that a man should have faith in Christ in order to be saved. The one may be dispensed with, the other cannot. A Christian at any period of his Christian experience, if it please God to take him, is fit for the kingdom. The life *is* life, whether it be the budding beauty and feebleness of childhood, or the strength of manhood, or the maturity and calm peace of old age. But 'add to your faith,' that 'an entrance may be ministered unto you *abundantly.*' Remember that though the root of the matter, the seed of the kingdom, may be in you; and that though, therefore, you have a right to feel that, at any period of your Christian experience, if it please God to take you out of this world, you are fit for heaven—yet in His mercy He is leaving you here, training you, disciplining you, cleansing you, making you to be polished shafts in His quiver; and that all the glowing furnaces of fiery trial and all the cold waters of affliction are but the preparation through which the rough iron is to be passed before it becomes tempered steel, a shaft in the Master's hand.

And so learn to look upon all trial as being at once the seal of your sonship, and the means by which God puts it within your power to win a higher place, a loftier throne, a nobler crown, a closer fellowship with Him 'who hath suffered, being tempted,' and who will receive into His own blessedness and rest them that are tempted. 'The child, though he be an heir, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors.' God puts us in the school of sorrow under that stern tutor and governor here, and gives us the opportunity of 'suffering with Christ,' that by the daily crucifixion of our old nature, by the lessons and blessings of outward calamities and change, there may grow up in us a still nobler and purer, and perfecter divine life; and that we may so be made capable—more capable, and capable of more—of that inheritance for which the only necessary thing is the death of Christ, and the only fitness is faith in His name.

III. Finally, that inheritance is the necessary result of the suffering that has gone before.

The suffering results from our union with Christ.

That union must needs culminate in glory. It is not only because the joy hereafter seems required in order to vindicate God's love to His children, who here reap sorrow from their sonship, that the discipline of life cannot but end in blessedness. That ground of mere compensation is a low one on which to rest the certainty of future bliss. But the inheritance is sure to all who here suffer with Christ, because the one cause—union with the Lord—produces both the present result of fellowship in His sorrows, and the future result of joy in His joy, of possession of His possessions. The inheritance is sure because Christ possesses it now. The inheritance is sure because earth's sorrows not merely require to be repaid by its peace, but because they have an evident design to fit us for it, and it would be destructive to all faith in God's wisdom, and God's knowledge of His own purposes, not to believe that what He has wrought us for will be given to us. Trials have no meaning, unless they are means to an end. The end is the inheritance, and sorrows here, as well as the Spirit's work here, are the earnest of the inheritance. Measure the greatness of the glory by what has preceded it. God takes all these years of life, and all the sore trials and afflictions that belong inevitably to an earthly career, and works them in, into the blessedness that *shall* come. If a fair measure of the greatness of any result of productive power be the length of time that was taken for getting it ready, we can dimly conceive what that joy must be for which seventy years of strife and pain and sorrow are but a momentary preparation; and what must be the weight of that glory which is the counterpoise and consequence to the afflictions of this lower world. The further the pendulum swings on the one side, the further it goes up on the other. The deeper God plunges the comet into the darkness out yonder, the closer does it come to the sun at its nearest distance, and the longer does it stand basking and glowing in the full blaze of the glory from the central orb. So in *our* revolution, the measure of the distance from the farthest point of our darkest earthly sorrow, *to* the throne, may help us to the measure of the closeness of the bright, perfect, perpetual glory above, when we are *on* the throne: for if so be that we are sons, we *must* suffer with Him; if so be that we suffer, we *must* be glorified together!

THE REVELATION OF SONS

'For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.'—ROMANS viii. 19.

THE Apostle has been describing believers as 'sons' and 'heirs.' He drops from these transcendent heights to contrast their present apparent condition with their true character and their future glory. The sad realities of suffering darken his lofty hopes, even although these sad realities are to his faith tokens of joint-heirship with Jesus, and pledges that if our inheritance is here manifested by suffering with him, that very fact is a prophecy of common glory hereafter. He describes that future as the revealing of a glory, to which the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared; and then, in our text he varies the application of that thought of revealing and thinks of the subjects of it as being the 'sons of God.' They will be revealed when the glory which they have as joint-heirs with Christ is revealed in them. They walk, as it were, compassed with mist and cloud, but the splendour which will fall on them will scatter the envious darkness, and 'when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall His co-heirs also appear with Him in glory.'

We may consider—

I. The present veil over the sons of God.

There is always a difference between appearance and reality, between the ideal and its embodiments. For all men it is true that the full expression of oneself is impossible. Each man's deeds fall short of disclosing the essential self in the man. Every will is hampered by the fleshly screen of the body. 'I would that my tongue could utter the thoughts that arise in me,' is the yearning of every heart that is deeply moved. Contending principles successively sway every personality and thwart each other's expression. For these, and many other reasons, the sum-total of every life is but a shrouded representation of the man who lives it; and we, all of us, after all efforts at self-revelation, remain mysteries to our fellows and to ourselves. All this is eminently true of the sons of God. They have a life-germ hidden in their souls, which in its very nature is destined to fill and expand their whole being, and to permeate with its triumphant energy every corner of their nature. But it is weak and often overborne by its opposite. The seed sown is to grow in spite of bad weather and a poor soil and many weeds, and though it is destined to overcome all these, it may to-day only be able to show on the surface a little patch of pale and struggling growth. When we think of the cost at which the life of Christ was imparted to men, and of the divine source from which it comes. and of the sedulous and protracted discipline through which it is being trained, we cannot but conclude that nothing short of its universal dominion over all the faculties of its imperfect possessors can be the goal of its working. Hercules in his cradle is still Hercules, and strangles snakes. Frost and sun may struggle in midwinter, and the cold may seem to predominate, but the sun is steadily enlarging its course in the sky, and increasing the fervour of its beams, and midsummer day is as sure to dawn as the shortest day was.

The sons of God, even more truly than other men, have contending principles fighting within them. It was the same Apostle who with oaths denied that he 'knew the man,' and in a passion of clinging love and penitence fell at His feet; but for the mere onlooker it would be hard to say which was the true man and which would conquer. The sons of God, like other men, have to express themselves in words which are never closely enough fitted to their thoughts and feelings. David's penitence has to be contented with groans which are not deep enough; and John's calm raptures on his Saviour's breast can only be spoken by shut eyes and silence. The sons of God never fully correspond to their character, but always fall somewhat beneath their desire, and must always be somewhat less than their intention. The artist never wholly embodies his conception. It is only God who 'rests from His works,' because the works fully embody His creative design and fully receive the benediction of His own satisfaction with them.

From all such thoughts there arises a piece of plain practical wisdom, which warns Christian men not to despond or despair if they do not find themselves living up to their ideal. The sons of God are 'veiled' because the world's estimate of them is untrue. The old commonplace that the world knows nothing of its greatest men is verified in the opinions which it holds about the sons of God. It is not for their Christianity that they get any of the world's honours and encomiums, if such fall to their share. They are *un*known and yet *well*-known. They live for the most part veiled in obscurity. 'The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not.' They are God's hidden ones. If they are wise, they will look for no recognition nor eulogy from the world, and will be content to live, as unknown by the princes of this world as was the Lord of glory, whom they slew because their dim eyes could not see the flashing of the glory 'through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.' But no consciousness of imperfection in our revelation of an indwelling Christ must ever be allowed to diminish our efforts to live out the life that is in us, and to shine as lights in the world; nor must the consciousness that we walk as 'veiled,' lead us to add to the thick folds the criminal one of voluntary silence and cowardly hiding in dumb hearts the secret of our lives.

II. The unveiling of the sons of God.

That unveiling is in the text represented as coming along with the glory which shall be revealed to usward, and as being contemporaneous with the deliverance of the creation itself from the bondage of corruption, and its passing into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. It coincides with the vanishing of the pain in which the whole creation now groans and travails, and with the adoption—that is, the redemption of our body. Then hope will be seen and will pass into still fruition. All this points to the time when

Jesus Christ is revealed, and His servants are revealed with Him in glory. That revelation brings with it of necessity the manifestation of the sons of God for what they are—the making visible in the life of what God sees them to be.

That revelation of the sons of God is the result of the entire dominion and transforming supremacy of the Spirit of God in them. In the whole sweep of their consciousness there will in that day be nothing done from other motives; there will be no sidelights flashing in and disturbing the perfect illumination from the candle of the Lord set on high in their being; there will be no contradictions in the life. It will be one and simple, and therefore perfectly intelligible. Such is the destined issue of the most imperfect Christian life. The Christian man who has in his experience to-day the faintest and most interrupted operation of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has therein a pledge of immortality, because nothing short of an endless life of progressive and growing purity will be adequate to receive and exemplify the power which can never terminate until it is made like Him and perfectly seeing Him as He is.

But that unveiling further guarantees the possession of fully adequate means of expression. The limitations and imperfections of our present bodily life will all drop away in putting on 'the body of glory' which shall be ours. The new tongue will perfectly utter the new knowledge and rapture of the new life; new hands will perfectly realise our ideals; and on every forehead will be stamped Christ's new name.

That unveiling will be further realised by a divine act indicating the characters of the sons of God by their position. Earth's judgments will be reversed by that divine voice, and the great promise, which through weary ages has shone as a far-off star,—'I will set him on high because he hath known my name'—will then be known for the sun near at hand. Many names loudly blown through the world's trumpet will fall silent then. Many stars will be quenched, but 'they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament.'

That revelation will be more surprising to no one than to those who are its subjects, when they see themselves mirrored in that glass, and so unlike what they are here. Their first impulse will be to wonder at the form they see, and to ask, almost with incredulity, 'Lord, is it I?' Nor will the wonder be less when they recognise many whom they knew not. The surprises when the family of God is gathered together at last will be great. The Israel of Captivity lifts up her wondering eyes as she sees the multitudes flocking to her side as the doves to their windows, and, half-ashamed of her own narrow vision, exclaims, 'I was left alone; these, where had they been?' Let us rejoice that in the day when the sons of God are revealed, many hidden ones from many dark corners will sit at the Father's table. That revelation will be made to the whole universe; we know not how, but we know that it shall be; and, as the text tells us, that revelation of the sons of God is the hope for which 'the earnest expectation of the creature waits' through the weary ages.

THE REDEMPTION OF THE BODY

'The adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.'—ROMANS viii. 23.

IN a previous verse Paul has said that all true Christians have received 'the Spirit of adoption.' They become sons of God through Christ the Son. They receive a new spiritual and divine life from God through Christ, and that life is like its source. In so far as that new life vitalises and dominates their nature, believers have received 'the Spirit of adoption,' and by it they cry 'Abba, Father.' But the body still remains a source of weakness, the seat of sin. It is sluggish and inapt for high purposes; it still remains subject to 'the law of sin and death'; and so is not like the Father who breathed into it the breath of life. It remains in bondage, and has not yet received the adoption. This text, in harmony with the Apostle's whole teaching, looks forward to a change in the body and in its relations to the renewed spirit, as the crown and climax of the work of redemption, and declares that till that change is effected, the condition of Christian men is imperfect, and is a waiting, and often a groaning.

In dealing with some of the thoughts that arise from this text, we note—

I. That a future bodily life is needed in order to give definiteness and solidity to the conception of immortality.

Before the Gospel came men's belief in a future life was vague and powerless, mainly because it had no Gospel of the Resurrection, and so nothing tangible to lay hold on. The Gospel has made the belief in a future state infinitely easier and more powerful, mainly because of the emphasis with which it has proclaimed an actual resurrection and a future bodily life. Its great proof of immortality is drawn, not merely from ethical considerations of the manifest futility of earthly life which has no sequel beyond the grave, nor from the intuitions and longings of men's souls, but from the historical fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of His Ascension in bodily form into heaven. It proclaims these two facts as parts of His experience, and asserts that when He rose from the dead and ascended up on high, He did so as 'the first-born among many brethren,' their forerunner and their pattern. It is this which gives the Gospel its power, and thus transforms a vague and shadowy conception of immortality into a solid faith, for which we have already an historical guarantee. Stupendous mysteries still veil the nature of the resurrection process, though these are exaggerated into inconceivabilities by false notions of what constitutes personal identity; but if the choice lies between accepting the Christian doctrine of a resurrection and the conception of a finite spirit disembodied and yet active, there can be no doubt as to which of these two is the more reasonable and thinkable. Body, soul, and spirit make the complete triune man.

The thought of the future life as a bodily life satisfies the longings of the heart. Much natural shrinking from death comes from unwillingness to part company with an old companion and friend. As Paul puts it in 2nd Corinthians, 'Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon.' All thoughts of the future which do not give prominence to the idea of a bodily life open up but a ghastly and uninviting mode of existence, which cannot but repel those who are accustomed to the fellowship of their bodies, and they feel that they cannot think of themselves as deprived of that which was their servant and instrument, through all the years of their earthly consciousness.

II. 'The body that shall be' is an emancipated body. The varied gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon the Christian Church served to quicken the hope of the yet greater gifts of that indwelling Spirit which were yet to come. Chief amongst these our text considers the transformation of the earthly into a spiritual body. This transformation our text regards as being the participation by the body in the redemption by which Christ has bought us with the great price of His blood. We have to interpret the language here in the light of the further teaching of Paul in the great Resurrection chapter of 1st Corinthians, which distinctly lays stress, not on the identity of the corporeal frame which is laid in the grave with 'the body of glory,' but upon the entire contrast between the 'natural body,' which is fit organ for the lower nature, and is informed by it, and the 'spiritual body,' which is fit organ for the spirit. We have to interpret 'the resurrection of the body' by the definite apostolic declaration, 'Thou sowest not that body that shall be . . . but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him'; and we have to give full weight to the contrasts which the Apostle draws between the characteristics of that which is 'sown' and of that which is 'raised.' The one is 'sown in corruption and raised in incorruption.' Natural decay is contrasted with immortal youth. The one is 'sown in dishonour,' the other is 'raised in glory.' That contrast is ethical, and refers either to the subordinate position of the body here in relation to the spirit, or to the natural sense of shame, or to the ideas of degradation which are attached to the indulgence of the appetites. The one is 'sown in weakness,' the other is 'raised in power'; the one is 'sown a natural body,' the other is 'raised a spiritual body.' Is not Paul in this whole series of contrasts thinking primarily of the vision which he saw on the road to Damascus when the risen Christ appeared before him? And had not the years which had passed since then taught him to see in the ascended Christ the prophecy and the pattern of what His servants should become? We have further to keep in view Paul's other representation in 2nd Corinthians v., where he strongly puts the contrast between the corporeal environment of earth and 'the body of glory,' which belongs to the future life, in his two images: 'the earthly house of this tabernacle,'—a clay hut which lasts but for a time,—and 'the building of God, the house not made with hands and eternal.' The body is an occasion of separation from the Lord.

These considerations may well lead us to, at least, general outlines on which a confident and peaceful hope may fix. For example, they lead us to the thought that that redeemed body is no more subject to decay and death, is no more weighed upon by weakness and weariness, has no work beyond its strength, needs no sustenance by food, and no refreshment of sleep. 'The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them,' suggests strength constantly communicated by a direct divine gift. And from all these negative characteristics there follows that there will be in that future bodily life no epochs of age marked by bodily changes. The two young men who were seen sitting in the sepulchre of Jesus had lived before Adam, and would seem as young if we saw them to-day.

Similarly the redeemed body will be a more perfect instrument for communication with the external universe. We know that the present body conditions our knowledge, and that our senses do not take cognisance of all the qualities of material things. Microscopes and telescopes have enlarged our field of vision, and have brought the infinitely small and the infinitely distant within our range. Our ear hears vibrations at a certain rate per second, and no doubt if it were more delicately organised we could hear sounds where now is silence. Sometimes the creatures whom we call 'inferior' seem to have senses that apprehend much of which we are not aware. Balaam's ass saw the obstructing angel before Balaam did. Nor is there any reason to suppose that all the powers of the mind find tools to work with in the body. It is possible that that body which is the fit instrument of the spirit may become its means of knowing more deeply, thinking more wisely, understanding more swiftly, comprehending more widely, remembering more firmly and judging more soundly. It is possible that the contrast between then and now may be like the contrast between telegraph and slow messenger in regard to the rapidity, between photograph and poor daub in regard to the truthfulness, between a full-orbed circle and a fragmentary arc in regard to the completeness of the messages which the body brings to the indwelling self.

But, once more, the body unredeemed has appetites and desires which may lead to their own satisfaction, which do lead to sordid cares and weary toil. 'The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh' The redeemed body will have in it nothing to tempt and nothing to clog, but will be a helper to the spirit and a source of strength. Glorious work of God as the body is, it has its weaknesses, its limitations, and its tendencies to evil. We must not be tempted into brooding over unanswered questions as to 'How do the dead rise, and with what body do they come?' But we can lift our eyes to the mountain-top where Jesus went up to pray. 'And as He prayed the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became white and dazzling'; and He was capable of entering into the Shekinah cloud and holding fellowship therein with the Father, who attested His Sonship and bade us listen to His voice. And we can look to Olivet and follow the ascending Jesus as He lets His benediction drop on the upturned faces of His friends, until He again passes into the Shekinah cloud, and leaving the world, goes to the Father. And from both His momentary transfiguration and His permanent Ascension we can draw the certain assurance that 'He shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.'

III. The redeemed body is a consequence of Christ's indwelling Spirit.

It is no natural result of death or resurrection, but is the outcome of the process begun on earth, by which, 'through faith and the righteousness of faith,' the spirit is life. The context distinctly enforces this view by its double use of 'adoption,' which in one aspect has already been received, and is manifested by the fact that 'now are we the sons of God,' and in another aspect is still 'waited' for. The Christian man in his regenerated spirit has been born again; the Christian man still waits for the completion of that sonship in a time when the regenerated spirit will no longer dwell in the clay cottage of 'this tabernacle,' but will inhabit a congruous dwelling in 'the building of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.'

Scripture is too healthy and comprehensive to be contented with a merely spiritual regeneration, and is withal too spiritual to be satisfied with a merely material heaven. It gives full place to both elements, and yet decisively puts all belonging to the latter second. It lays down the laws that for a complete humanity there must be body as well as spirit; that there must be a correspondence between the two, and as is the spirit so must the body be, and further, that the process must begin at the centre and work outwards, so that the spirit must first be transformed, and then the body must be participant of the transformation.

All that Scripture says about 'rising in glory' is said about believers. It is represented as a spiritual process. They who have the Spirit of God in their spirits because they have it receive the glorified body which is like their Saviour's. It is not enough to die in order to 'rise glorious.' 'If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.' The resurrection is promised for all mankind, but it may be a resurrection in which there shall be endless living and no glory, nor any beauty and no blessedness But the body may be 'sown in weakness,' and in weakness raised; it may be 'sown in dishonour' and in dishonour raised; it may be sown dead, and raised a living death. 'Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' Does that mean nothing? 'They that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.' Does that mean nothing?

There are dark mysteries in these and similar words of Scripture which should make us all pause and solemnly reflect. The sole way which leads to the resurrection of glory is the way of faith in Jesus Christ. If we yield ourselves to Him, He will plant His Spirit in our spirits, will guide and growingly sanctify us through life, will deliver us by the indwelling of the Spirit of life in Him from the law of sin and death. Nor will His transforming power cease till it has pervaded our whole being with its fiery energy, and we stand at the last men like Christ, redeemed in body, soul, and spirit, 'according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.'

THE INTERCEDING SPIRIT

'The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.'—ROMANS viii. 26.

PENTECOST was a transitory sign of a perpetual gift. The tongues of fire and the rushing mighty wind, which were at first the most conspicuous results of the gifts of the Spirit, tongues, and prophecies, and gifts of healing, which were to the early Church itself and to onlookers palpable demonstrations of an indwelling power, were little more lasting than the fire and the wind. Does anything remain? This whole great chapter is Paul's triumphant answer to such a question. The Spirit of God dwells in every believer as the source of his true life, is for him 'the Spirit of adoption,' and witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. Not only does that Spirit co-operate with the human spirit in this witness-bearing, but the verse, of which our text is a part, points to another form of co-operation: for the word rendered in the earlier part of the verse 'helpeth' in the original suggests more distinctly that the Spirit of God in His intercession for us works in association with us.

First, then—

I. The Spirit's intercession is not carried on apart from us.

Much modern hymnology goes wrong in this point, that it represents the Spirit's intercession as presented in heaven rather than as taking place within the personal being of the believer. There is a broad distinction carefully observed throughout Scripture between the representations of the work of Christ and that of the Spirit of Christ. The former in its character and revelation and attainment was wrought upon earth, and in its character of intercession and bestowment of blessings is discharged at the right hand of God in heaven; the whole of the Spirit's work, on the other hand, is wrought in human spirits here. The context speaks of intercession expressed in 'groanings which cannot be uttered,' and which, unexpressed though they are, are fully understood 'by Him who searches the heart.' Plainly, therefore, these groanings come from human hearts, and as plainly are the Divine Spirit's voicing them.

II. The Spirit's intercession in our spirits consists in our own divinely-inspired longings.

The Apostle has just been speaking of another groaning within ourselves, which is the expression of 'the earnest expectation' of 'the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body'; and he says that that longing will be the more patient the more it is full of hope. This, then, is Paul's conception of the normal attitude of a Christian soul; but that attitude is hard to keep up in one's own strength, because of the distractions of time and sense which are ever tending to disturb the continuity and fixity of that onward look, and to lead us rather to be satisfied with the gross, dull present. That redemption of the body, with all which it implies and includes, ought to be the supreme object to which each Christian heart should ever be turning, and Christian prayers should be directed. But our own daily experience makes us only too sure that such elevation above, and remoteness from earthly thoughts, with all their pettinesses and limitations, is impossible for us in our own strength. As Paul puts it here, 'We know not what to pray for'; nor can we fix and focus our desires, nor present them 'as we ought.' It is to this weakness and incompleteness of our desires and prayers that the help of the Spirit is directed. He strengthens our longings by His own direct operation. The more vivid our anticipations and the more steadfast our hopes, and the more our spirits reach out to that future redemption, the more are we bound to discern something more than human imaginings in them, and to be sure that such visions are too good not to be true, too solid to be only the play of our own fancy. The more we are conscious of these experiences as our own, the more certain we shall be that in them it is not we that speak, but 'the Spirit of the Father that speaketh in us.'

III. These divinely-inspired longings are incapable of full expression.

They are shallow feelings that can be spoken. Language breaks down in the attempt to express our deepest emotions and our truest love. For all the deepest things in man, inarticulate utterance is the most self-revealing. Grief can say more in a sob and a tear than in many weak words; love finds its tongue in the light of an eye and the clasp of a hand. The groanings which rise from the depths of the Christian soul cannot be forced into the narrow frame-work of human language; and just because they are unutterable are to be recognised as the voice of the Holy Spirit.

But where amidst the Christian experience of to-day shall we find anything in the least like these unutterable longings after the redemption of the body which Paul here takes it for granted are the experience of all Christians? There is no more startling condemnation of the average Christianity of our times than the calm certainty with which through all this epistle the Apostle takes it for granted that the experience of the Roman Christians will universally endorse his statements. Look for a moment at what these statements are. Listen to the briefest summary of them: 'We cry, Abba, Father'; 'We are children of God'; 'We suffer with Him that we may be glorified with Him'; 'Glory shall be revealed to usward'; 'We have the first-fruits of the Spirit'; 'We ourselves groan within ourselves'; 'By hope were we saved'; 'We hope for that which we see not'; 'Then do we with patience wait for it'; 'We know that to them that love God all things work together for good'; 'In all these things we are more than conquerors'; 'Neither death nor life . . . nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God.' He believed that in these rapturous and triumphant words he was gathering together the experience of every Roman Christian, and would evoke from their lips a confident 'Amen.' Where are the communities to-day in whose hearing these words could be reiterated with the like assurance? How few among us there are who know anything of these 'groanings which cannot be uttered!' How few among us there are whose spirits are stretching out eager desires towards the land of perpetual summer, like migratory birds in northern latitudes when the autumn days are shortening and the temperature is falling!

But, however we must feel that our poor experience falls far short of the ideal in our text, an ideal which was to some extent realised in the early Christian Church, we must beware of taking the imperfections of our experience as any evidence of the unreality of our Christianity. They are a proof that we have limited and impeded the operation of the Spirit within us. They teach us that He will not intercede 'with groanings which cannot be uttered' unless we let Him speak through our voices. Therefore, if we find that in our own consciousness there is little to correspond to those unuttered groanings, we should take the warning: 'Quench not the Spirit.' 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God in whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption.'

IV. The unuttered longings are sure to be answered.

He that searcheth the heart knows the meaning of the Spirit's unspoken prayers; and looking into the depths of the human spirit interprets its longings, discriminating between the mere human and partial expression and the divinely-inspired desire which may be unexpressed. If our prayers are weak, they are answered in the measure in which they embody in them, though perhaps mistaken by us, a divine longing. Apparent disappointment of our petitions may be real answers to our real prayer. It was because Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus that He abode still in the same place where He was, to let Lazarus die that He might be raised again. That was the true answer to the sisters' hope of His immediate coming. God's way of giving to us is to breathe within us a desire, and then to answer the desire inbreathed. So, longing is the prophecy of fulfilment when it is longing according to the will of God. They who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness' may ever be sure that their bread shall be given them, and their water will be made sure. The true object of our desires is often not clear to us, and so we err in translating it into words. Let us be thankful that we pray to a God who can discern the prayer within the prayer, and often gives the substance of our petitions in the very act of refusing their form.

THE GIFT THAT BRINGS ALL GIFTS

'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?'—ROMANS viii. 32.

WE have here an allusion to, if not a distinct quotation from, the narrative in Genesis, of Abraham's offering up of Isaac. The same word which is employed in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, to translate the Hebrew word rendered in our Bible as 'withheld,' is employed here by the Apostle. And there is evidently floating before his mind the thought that, in some profound and real sense, there is an analogy between that wondrous and faithful act of giving up and the transcendent and stupendous gift to the world, from God, of His Son.

If we take that point of view, the language of my text rises into singular force, and suggests many very deep thoughts, about which, perhaps, silence is best. But led by that analogy, let us deal with these words.

I. Consider this mysterious act of divine surrender.

The analogy seems to suggest to us, strange as it may be, and remote from the cold and abstract ideas of the divine nature which it is thought to be philosophical to cherish, that something corresponding to the pain and loss that shadowed the patriarch's heart flitted across the divine mind when the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Not merely to give, but to give up, is the highest crown and glory of love, as we know it. And who shall venture to say that we so fully apprehend the divine nature as to be warranted in declaring that some analogy to that is impossible for Him? Our language is, 'I will not offer unto God that which doth cost me nothing.' Let us bow in silence before the dim intimation that seems to flicker out of the words of my text, that so He says to us, 'I will not offer unto you that which doth cost Me nothing.' 'He *spared* not His own Son'; withheld Him not from us.

But passing from that which, I dare say, many of you may suppose to be fanciful and unwarranted, let us come upon the surer ground of the other words of my text. And notice how the reality of the surrender is emphasised by the closeness of the bond which, in the mysterious eternity, knits together the Father and the Son. As with Abraham, so in this lofty example, of which Abraham and Isaac were but as dim, wavering reflections in water, the Son is His own Son. It seems to me impossible, upon any fair interpretation of the words before us, to refrain from giving to that epithet here its very highest and most mysterious sense. It cannot be any mere equivalent for Messiah, it cannot merely mean a man who was like God in purity of nature and in closeness of communion. For the force of the analogy and the emphasis of that word which is even more emphatic in the Greek than in the English 'His *own* Son,' point to a community of nature, to a uniqueness and singleness of relation, to a closeness of intimacy, to which no other is a parallel. And so we have to estimate the measure of the surrender by the tenderness and awfulness of the bond. 'Having one Son, His well-beloved, He sent Him.'

Notice, again, how the greatness of the surrender is made more emphatic by the contemplation of it in its double negative and positive aspect, in the two successive clauses. 'He spared not His Son, but delivered Him up,' an absolute, positive giving of Him over to the humiliation of the life and to the mystery of the death.

And notice how the tenderness and the beneficence that were the sole motive of the surrender are lifted into light in the last words, 'for us all.' The single, sole reason that bowed, if I may so say, the divine purpose, and determined the mysterious act, was a pure desire for our blessing. No definition is given as to the manner in which that surrender wrought for our good. The Apostle does not need to dwell upon that. His purpose is to emphasise the entire unselfishness, the utter simplicity of the motive which moved the divine will. One great throb of love to the whole of humanity led to that transcendent surrender, before which we can only bow and say, 'Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.'

And now, notice how this mysterious act is grasped by the Apostle here as what I may call the illuminating fact as to the whole divine nature. From it, and from it alone, there falls a blaze of light on the deepest things in God. We are accustomed to speak of Christ's perfect life of unselfishness, and His death of pure beneficence, as being the great manifestation to us all that in His heart there is an infinite fountain of love to us. We are, further, accustomed to speak of Christ's mission and death as being the revelation to us of the love of God as well as of the Man Christ Jesus, because we believe that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world,' and that He has so manifested and revealed the very nature of divinity to us, in His life and in His person, that, as He Himself says, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' And every conclusion that we draw as to the love of Christ is, *ipso facto*, a conclusion as to the love of God. But my text looks at the matter from rather a different point of view, and bids us see, in Christ's mission and sacrifice, the great demonstration of the love of God, not only because 'God was in Christ,' but because the Father's will, conceived of as distinct from, and yet harmonious with, the will of the Son, gives Him up for us. And we have to say, not only that we see the love of God *in* the love of Christ, but 'God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son' that we might have life through Him.

These various phases of the love of Christ as manifesting the divine love, may not be capable of perfect harmonising in our thoughts, but they do blend into one, and by reason of them all, 'God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.' We have to think not only of Abraham who gave up, but of the unresisting, innocent Isaac, bearing on his shoulders the wood for the burnt offering, as the Christ bore the Cross on His, and suffering himself to be bound upon the pile, not only by the cords that tied his limbs, but by the cords of obedience and submission, and in both we have to bow before the Apocalypse of divine love.

II. So, secondly, look at the power of this divine surrender to bring with it all other gifts.

'How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' The Apostle's triumphant question requires for its affirmative answer only the belief in the unchangeableness of the Divine heart, and the uniformity of the Divine purpose. And if these be recognised, their conclusion inevitably follows. 'With Him He will freely give us all things.'

It is so, because the greater gift implies the less. We do not expect that a man who hands over a million of pounds to another, to help him, will stick at a farthing afterwards. If you give a diamond you may well give a box to keep it in. In God's gift the lesser will follow the lead of the greater; and whatsoever a man can want, it is a smaller thing for Him to bestow, than was the gift of His Son.

There is a beautiful contrast between the manners of giving the two sets of gifts implied in words of the original, perhaps scarcely capable of being reproduced in any translation. The expression that is rendered 'freely give,' implies that there is a grace and a pleasantness in the act of bestowal. God gave in Christ, what we may reverently say it was something like pain to give. Will He not give the lesser, whatever they may be, which it is the joy of His heart to communicate? The greater implies the less.

Farther, this one great gift draws all other gifts after it, because the purpose of the greater gift cannot be attained without the bestowment of the lesser. He does not begin to build being unable to finish; He does not miscalculate His resources, nor stultify Himself by commencing upon a large scale, and having to stop short before the purpose with which He began is accomplished. Men build great palaces, and are bankrupt before the roof is put on. God lays His plans with the knowledge of His powers, and having first of all bestowed this large gift, is not going to have it bestowed in vain for want of some smaller ones to follow it up. Christ puts the same argument to us, beginning only at the other end of the process. Paul says, 'God has laid the foundation in Christ.' Do you think He will stop before the headstone is put on? Christ said, 'It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.' Do you think He will not give you bread and water on the road to it? Will He send out His soldiers half-equipped; will it be found when they are on their march that they have been started with a defective commissariat, and with insufficient trenching tools? Shall the children of the King, on the road to their thrones, be left to scramble along anyhow, in want of what they need to get there? That is not God's way of doing. He that hath begun a good work will also perfect the same, and when He gave to you and me His Son, He bound Himself to give us every subsidiary and secondary blessing which was needed to make that Son's work complete in each of us.

Again, this great blessing draws after it, by necessary consequence, all other lesser and secondary gifts, inasmuch as, in every real sense, everything is included and possessed in the Christ when we receive Him. 'With Him,' says Paul, as if that gift once laid in a man's heart actually enclosed within it, and had for its indispensable accompaniment the possession of every smaller thing that a man can need, Jesus Christ is, as it were, a great Cornucopia, a horn of abundance, out of which will pour, with magic affluence, all manner of supplies according as we require. This fountain flows with milk, wine, and water, as men need. Everything is given us when Christ is given to us, because Christ is the Heir of all things, and we possess all things in Him; as some poor village maiden married to a prince in disguise, who, on the morrow of her wedding finds that she is lady of broad lands, and mistress of a kingdom. 'He that spared not His own Son,' not only 'with Him will give,' but in Him has 'given us all things.'

And so, brethren, just as that great gift is the illuminating fact in reference to the divine heart, so is it the interpreting fact in reference to the divine dealings. Only when we keep firm hold of Christ as the gift of God, and the Explainer of all that God does, can we face the darkness, the perplexities, the torturing questions that from the beginning have harassed men's minds as they looked upon the mysteries of human misery. If we recognise that God has given us His Son, then all things become, if not plain, at least lighted with some gleam from that great gift; and we feel that the surrender of Christ is the constraining fact which shapes after its own likeness, and for its own purpose, all the rest of God's dealings with men. That gift makes anything believable, reasonable, possible, rather than that He should spare not His own Son, and then should counterwork His own act by sending the world anything but good.

III. And now, lastly, take one or two practical issues from these thoughts, in reference to our own belief and conduct.

First, I would say, Let us correct our estimates of the relative importance of the two sets of gifts. On the one side stands the solitary Christ; on the other side are massed all delights of sense, all blessings of time, all the things that the vulgar estimation of men unanimously recognises to be good. These are only makeweights. They are all lumped together into an 'also.' They are but the golden dust that may be filed off from the great ingot and solid block. They are but the outward tokens of His far deeper and true preciousness. They are secondary; He is the primary. What an inversion of our notions of good! Do *you* degrade all the world's wealth, pleasantness, ease, prosperity, into an 'also?' Are you content to put it in the secondary place, as a result, if it please Him, of Christ? Do you live as if you did? Which do you hunger for most? Which do you labour for hardest? 'Seek ye first the Kingdom' and the King, and all 'these things shall be added unto you.'

Let these thoughts teach us that sorrow too is one of the gifts of the Christ. The words of my text, at first sight, might seem to be simply a promise of abundant earthly good. But look what lies close beside them, and is even part of the same triumphant burst. 'Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' These are some of the 'all things' which Paul expected that God would give him and his brethren. And looking upon all, he says, 'They all work together for good'; and in them all we may be more than conquerors. It would be a poor, shabby issue of such a great gift as that of which we have been speaking, if it were only to be followed by the sweetnesses and prosperity and wealth of this world. But here is the point that we have to keep hold of—inasmuch as He gives us all things, let us take all the things that come to us as being as distinctly the gifts of His love, as is the gift of Christ Himself. A wise physician, to an ignorant onlooker, might seem to be acting in contradictory fashions when in the one moment he slashes into a limb, with a sharp, gleaming knife, and in the next sedulously binds the wounds, and closes the arteries, but the purpose of both acts is one.

The diurnal revolution of the earth brings the joyful sunrise and the pathetic sunset. The same annual revolution whirls us through the balmy summer days and the biting winter ones. God's purpose is one. His methods vary. The road goes straight to its goal; but it sometimes runs in tunnels dank and dark and stifling, and sometimes by sunny glades and through green pastures. God's purpose is always love, brother. His withdrawals are gifts, and sorrow is not the least of the benefits which come to us through the Man of Sorrows.

So again, let these thoughts teach us to live by a very quiet and peaceful faith. We find it a great deal easier to trust God for Heaven than for earth—for the distant blessings than for the near ones. Many a man will venture his soul into God's hands, who would hesitate to venture to-morrow's food there. Why? Is it not because we do not really trust Him for the greater that we find it so hard to trust Him for the less? Is it not because we want the less more really than we want the greater, that we can put ourselves off with faith for the one, and want something more solid to grasp for the other? Live in the calm confidence that God gives all things; and gives us for to-morrow as for eternity; for earth as for heaven.

And, last of all, make you quite sure that you have taken *the* great gift of God. He gives it to all the world, but they only have it who accept it by faith. Have you, my brother? I look out upon the lives of the mass of professing Christians; and this question weighs on my heart, judging by conduct—have they really got Christ for their own? 'Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?' Look how you are all fighting and scrambling, and sweating and fretting, to get hold of the goods of this present life, and here is a gift gleaming before you all the while that you will not condescend to take. Like a man standing in a market-place offering sovereigns for nothing, which nobody accepts because they think the offer is too good to be true, so God complains and wails: I have stretched out My hands all the day, laden with gifts, and no man regarded:

> 'It is only heaven may be had for the asking;
> It is only God that is given away.'

He gives His Son. Take Him by humble faith in His sacrifice and Spirit; take Him, and with Him He freely gives you all things.

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

'Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'—ROMANS viii. 37.

IN order to understand and feel the full force of this triumphant saying of the Apostle, we must observe that it is a negative answer to the preceding questions, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?' A heterogeneous mass the Apostle here brigades together as an antagonistic army. They are alike in nothing except that they are all evils. There is no attempt at an exhaustive enumeration, or at classification. He clashes down, as it were, a miscellaneous mass of evil things, and then triumphs over them, and all the genus to which they belong, as being utterly impotent to drag men away from Jesus Christ. To ask the question is to answer it, but the form of the answer is worth notice. Instead of directly replying, 'No! no such powerless things as these can separate us from the love of Christ,' he says, 'No! In all these things, whilst weltering amongst them, whilst ringed round about by them, as by encircling enemies, "we are more than conquerors."' Thereby, he suggests that there is something needing to be done by us, in order that the foes may not exercise their natural effect. And so, taking the words of my text in connection with that to which they are an answer, we have three things—the impotent enemies of love; the abundant victory of love; 'We are more than conquerors'; and the love that makes us victorious. Let us look then at these three things briefly.

I. First of all, the impotent enemies of love.

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There is contempt in the careless massing together of the foes which the Apostle enumerates. He begins with the widest word that covers everything—'affliction.' Then he specifies various forms of it—'distress,' *straitening*, as the word might be rendered, then he comes to evils inflicted for Christ's sake by hostile men—'persecution,' then he names purely physical evils, 'hunger' and 'nakedness,' then he harks back again to man's antagonism, 'peril,' and 'sword.' And thus carelessly, and without an effort at logical order, he throws together, as specimens of their class, these salient points, as it were, and crests of the great sea, whose billows threaten to roll over us; and he laughs at them all, as impotent and nought, when compared with the love of Christ, which shields us from them all.

Now it must be noticed that here, in his triumphant question, the Apostle means not our love to Christ but His to us; and not even our sense of that love, but the fact itself. And his question is just this:—Is there any evil in the world that can make Christ stop loving a man that cleaves to Him? And, as I said, to ask the question is to answer it. The two things belong to two different regions. They have nothing in common. The one moves amongst the low levels of earth; the other dwells up amidst the abysses of eternity, and to suppose that anything that assails and afflicts us here has any effect in making that great heart cease to love us is to fancy that the mists can quench the sunlight, is to suppose that that which lies down low in the earth can rise to poison and to darken the heavens.

There is no need, in order to rise to the full height of the Christian contempt for calamity, to deny any of its terrible power. These things can separate us from much. They can separate us from joy, from hope, from almost all that makes life desirable. They can strip us to the very quick, but the quick they cannot touch. The frost comes and kills the flowers, browns the leaves, cuts off the stems, binds the sweet music of the flowing rivers in silent chains, casts mists and darkness over the face of the solitary grey world, but it does not touch the life that is in the root.

And so all these outward sorrows that have power over the whole of the outward life, and can slay joy and all but stifle hope, and can ban men into irrevocable darkness and unalleviated solitude, they do not touch in the smallest degree the secret bond that binds the heart to Jesus, nor in any measure affect the flow of His love to us. Therefore we may front them and smile at them and say:

> 'Do as thou wilt, devouring time,
> With this wide world, and all its fading sweets';

'my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.'

You need not be very much afraid of anything being taken from you as long as Christ is left you. You will not be altogether hopeless so long as Christ, who is our hope, still speaks His faithful promises to you, nor will the world be lonely and dark to them who feel that they are lapt in the sweet and all-pervading consciousness of the changeless love of the heart of Christ. Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution?'—in any of these things, 'we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.' Brethren, that is the Christian way of looking at all externals, not only at the dark and the sorrowful, but at the bright and the gladsome. If the withdrawal of external blessings does not touch the central sanctities and sweetness of a life in communion with Jesus, the bestowal of external blessedness does not much brighten or gladden it. We can face the withdrawal of them all, we need not covet the possession of them all, for we have all in Christ; and the world without His love contributes less to our blessedness and our peace than the absence of all its joys with His love does. So let us feel that earth, in its givings and in its withholdings, is equally impotent to touch the one thing that we need, the conscious possession of the love of Christ.

All these foes, as I have said, have no power over the fact of Christ's love to us, but they have power, and a very terrible power, over our consciousness of that love; and we may so kick against the pricks as to lose, in the pain of our sorrows, the assurance of His presence, or be so fascinated by the false and vulgar sweetnesses and promises of the world as, in the eagerness of our chase after them, to lose our sense of the all-sufficing certitude of His love. Tribulation does not strip us of His love, but tribulation may so darken our perceptions that we cannot see the sun. Joys need not rob us of His heart, but joys may so fill ours, as that there shall be no longing for His presence within us. Therefore let us not exaggerate the impotence of these foes, but feel that there are real dangers, as in the sorrows so in the blessings of our outward life, and that the evil to be dreaded is that outward things, whether in their bright or in their dark aspects, may come between us and the home of our hearts, the love of the loving Christ.

II. So then, note next, the abundant victory of love.

Mark how the Apostle, in his lofty and enthusiastic way, is not content here with simply saying that he and his fellows conquer. It would be a poor thing, he seems to think, if the balance barely inclined to our side, if the victory were but just won by a hair's breadth and triumph were snatched, as it were, out of the very jaws of defeat. There must be something more than that to correspond to the power of the victorious Christ that is in us. And so, he says, we very abundantly conquer; we not only hinder these things which he has been enumerating from doing that which it is their aim apparently to do, but we actually convert them into helpers or allies. The '*more* than conquerors' seems to mean, if there is any definite idea to be attached to it, the conversion of the enemy conquered into a friend and a helper. The American Indians had a superstition that every foe tomahawked sent fresh strength into the warrior's arm. And so all afflictions and trials rightly borne, and therefore overcome, make a man stronger, and bring him nearer to Jesus Christ.

Note then, further, that not only is this victory more than bare victory, being the conversion of the enemy into allies, but that it is a victory which is won even whilst we are in the midst of the strife. It is not that we shall be conquerors in some far-off heaven, when the noise of battle has ceased and they hang the trumpet in the hall, but it is here now, in the hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot death-grapple that we do overcome. No ultimate victory, in some far-off and blessed heaven, will be ours unless moment by moment, here, to-day, 'we *are* more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'

So, then, about this abundant victory there are these things to say:—You conquer the world only, then, when you make it contribute to your conscious possession of the love of Christ. That is the real victory, the only real victory in life. Men talk about overcoming here on earth, and they mean thereby the accomplishment of their designs. A man has 'victory,' as it is phrased, in the world's strife, when he secures for himself the world's goods at which he has aimed, but that is not the Christian idea of the conquest of calamity. Everything that makes me feel more thrillingly in my inmost heart the verity and the sweetness of the love of Jesus Christ as my very own, is conquered by me and compelled to subserve my highest good, and everything which slips a film between me and Him, which obscures the light of His face to me, which makes me less desirous of, and less sure of, and less happy in, and less satisfied with, His love, is an enemy that has conquered me. And all these evils as the world calls them, and as our bleeding hearts have often felt them to be, are converted into allies and friends when they drive us to Christ, and keep us close to Him, in the conscious possession of His sweet and changeless love. That is the victory, and the only victory. Has the world helped me to lay hold of Christ? Then I have conquered it. Has the world loosened my grasp upon Him? Then it has conquered me.

Note then, further, that this abundant victory depends on how we deal with the changes of our outward lives, our sorrows or our joys. There is nothing, *per se*, salutary in affliction, there is nothing, *per se*, antagonistic to Christian faith in it either. No man is made better by his sorrows, no man need be made worse by them. That depends upon how we take the things which come storming against us. The set of your sails, and the firmness of your grasp upon the tiller, determine whether the wind shall carry you to the haven or shall blow you out, a wandering waif, upon a shoreless and melancholy sea. There are some of you that have been blown away from your moorings by sorrow. There are some professing Christians who have been hindered in their work, and had their peace and their faith shattered all but irrevocably, because they have not accepted, in the spirit in which they were sent, the trials that have come for their good

The worst of all afflictions is a wasted affliction, and they are all wasted unless they teach us more of the reality and the blessedness of the love of Jesus Christ.

III. Lastly, notice the love which makes us conquerors.

The Apostle, with a wonderful instinctive sense of fitness, names Christ here by a name congruous to the thoughts which occupy his mind, when he speaks of Him that loved us. His question has been, Can anything separate us from the love of Christ? And his answer is, So far from that being the case, that very love, by occasion of sorrows and afflictions, tightens its grasp upon us, and, by the communication of itself to us, makes us more than conquerors. This great love of Jesus Christ, from which nothing can separate us, will use the very things that seem to threaten our separation as a means of coming nearer to us in its depth and in its preciousness.

The Apostle says 'Him that loved us,' and the words in the original distinctly point to some one fact as being the great instance of love. That is to say they point to His death. And so we may say Christ's love helps us to conquer because in His death He interprets for us all possible sorrows. If it be true that love to each of us nailed Him there, then nothing that can come to us but must be a love-token, and a fruit of that same love. The Cross is the key to all tribulation, and shows it to be a token and an instrument of an unchanging love.

Further, that great love of Christ helps us to conquer, because in His sufferings and death He becomes the Companion of all the weary. The rough, dark, lonely road changes its look when we see His footprints there, not without specks of blood in them.

where the thorns tore His feet. We conquer our afflictions if we recognise that 'in all our afflictions He was afflicted,' and that Himself has drunk to its bitterest dregs the cup which He commends to our lips. He has left a kiss upon its margin, and we need not shrink when He holds it out to us and says 'Drink ye all of it.' That one thought of the companionship of the Christ in our sorrows makes us more than conquerors.

And lastly, this dying Lover of our souls communicates to us all, if we will, the strength whereby we may coerce all outward things into being helps to the fuller participation of His perfect love. Our sorrows and all the other distracting externals do seek to drag us away from Him. Is all that happens in counteraction to that pull of the world, that we tighten our grasp upon Him, and will not let Him go; as some poor wretch might the horns of the altar that did not respond to his grasp? Nay! what we lay hold of is no dead thing, but a living hand, and it grasps us more tightly than we can ever grasp it. So because He holds us, and not because we hold Him, we shall not be dragged away, by anything outside of our own weak and wavering souls, and all these embattled foes may come against us, they may shear off everything else, they cannot sever Christ from us unless we ourselves throw Him away. 'In this thou shalt conquer.' 'They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of His testimony.'

LOVE'S TRIUMPH

'Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.'—ROMANS viii. 38, 39.

THESE rapturous words are the climax of the Apostle's long demonstration that the Gospel is the revelation of 'the righteousness of God from faith to faith,' and is thereby 'the power of God unto salvation.' What a contrast there is between the beginning and the end of his argument! It started with sombre, sad words about man's sinfulness and aversion from the knowledge of God. It closes with this sunny outburst of triumph; like some stream rising among black and barren cliffs, or melancholy moorlands, and foaming through narrow rifts in gloomy ravines, it reaches at last fertile lands, and flows calm, the sunlight dancing on its broad surface, till it loses itself at last in the unfathomable ocean of the love of God.

We are told that the Biblical view of human nature is too dark. Well, the important question is not whether it is dark, but whether it is true. But, apart from that, the doctrine of Scripture about man's moral condition is not dark, if you will take the whole of it together. Certainly, a part of it is very dark. The picture, for instance, of what men are, painted at the beginning of this Epistle, is shadowed like a canvas of Rembrandt's. The Bible is 'Nature's sternest painter but her best.' But to get the whole doctrine of Scripture on the subject, we have to take its confidence as to what men may become, as well as its portrait of what they are—and then who will say that the anthropology of Scripture is gloomy? To me it seems that the unrelieved blackness of the view which, because it admits no fall, can imagine no rise, which sees in all man's sins and sorrows no token of the dominion of an alien power, and has, therefore, no reason to believe that they can be separated from humanity, is the true 'Gospel of despair,' and that the system which looks steadily at all the misery and all the wickedness, and calmly proposes to cast it all out, is really the only doctrine of human nature which throws any gleam of light on the darkness. Christianity begins indeed with, 'There is none that doeth good, no, not one,' but it ends with this victorious pæan of our text.

And what a majestic close it is to the great words that have gone before, fitly crowning even their lofty height! One might well shrink from presuming to take such words as a text, with any idea of exhausting or of enhancing them. My object is very much more humble. I simply wish to bring out the remarkable order, in which Paul here marshals, in his passionate, rhetorical amplification, all the enemies that can be supposed to seek to wrench us away from the love of God; and triumphs over them all. We shall best measure the fullness of the words by simply taking these clauses as they stand in the text.

I. The love of God is unaffected by the extremest changes of our condition.

The Apostle begins his fervid catalogue of vanquished foes by a pair of opposites which might seem to cover the whole ground—'neither death nor life.' What more can be said? Surely, these two include everything. From one point of view they do. But yet, as we shall see, there is more to be said. And the special reason for beginning with this pair of possible enemies is probably to be found by remembering that they are a pair, that between them they do cover the whole ground and represent the *extremes* of change which can befall us. The one stands at the one pole, the other at the other. If these two stations, so far from each other, are equally near to God's love, then no intermediate point can be far from it. If the most violent change which we can experience does not in the least matter to the grasp which the love of God has on us, or to the grasp which we may have on it, then no less violent a change can be of any consequence. It is the same thought in a somewhat modified form, as we find in another word of Paul's, 'Whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord.' Our subordination to Him is the same, and our consecration should be the same, in all varieties of condition, even in that greatest of all variations. His love to us makes no account of that mightiest of changes. How should it be affected by slighter ones?

The distance of a star is measured by the apparent change in its position, as seen from different points of the earth's surface or orbit. But this great Light stands steadfast in our heaven, nor moves a hair's-breadth, nor pours a feebler ray on us, whether we look up to it from the midsummer day of busy life, or from the midwinter of death. These opposites are parted by a distance to which the millions of miles of the world's path among the stars are but a point, and yet the love of God streams down on them alike.

Of course, the confidence in immortality is implied in this thought. Death does not, in the slightest degree, affect the essential vitality of the soul; so it does not, in the slightest degree, affect the outflow of God's love to that soul. It is a change of condition and circumstance, and no more. He does not lose us in the dust of death. The withered leaves on the pathway are trampled into mud, and indistinguishable to human eyes; but He sees them even as when they hung green and sunlit on the mystic tree of life.

How beautifully this thought contrasts with the saddest aspect of the power of death in our human experience! He is Death the Separator, who unclasps our hands from the closest, dearest grasp, and divides asunder joints and marrow, and parts soul and body, and withdraws us from all our habitude and associations and occupations, and loosens every bond of society and concord, and hales us away into a lonely land. But there is one bond which his 'abhorred shears' cannot cut. Their edge is turned on *it*. One Hand holds us in a grasp which the fleshless fingers of Death in vain strive to loosen. The separator becomes the uniter; he rends us apart from the world that He may 'bring us to God.' The love filtered by drops on us in life is poured upon us in a flood in death; 'for I am persuaded, that neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from the love of God.'

II. The love of God is undiverted from us by any other order of beings.

'Nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers,' says Paul. Here we pass from conditions affecting ourselves to living beings beyond ourselves. Now, it is important for understanding the precise thought of the Apostle to observe that this expression, when used without any qualifying adjective, seems uniformly to mean good angels, the hierarchy of blessed spirits before the throne. So that there is no reference to 'spiritual wickedness in high places' striving to draw men away from God. The supposition which the Apostle makes is, indeed, an impossible one, that these ministering spirits, who are sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation, should so forget their mission and contradict their nature as to seek to bar us out from the love which it is their chiefest joy to bring to us. He knows it to be an impossible supposition, and its very impossibility gives energy to his conclusion, just as when in the same fashion he makes the other equally impossible supposition about an angel from heaven preaching another gospel than that which he had preached to them.

So we may turn the general thought of this second category of impotent efforts in two different ways, and suggest, first, that it implies the utter powerlessness of any third party in regard to the relations between our souls and God.

We alone have to do with Him alone. The awful fact of individuality, that solemn mystery of our personal being, has its most blessed or its most dread manifestation in our relation to God. There no other Being has any power. Counsel and stimulus, suggestion or temptation, instruction or lies, which may tend to lead us nearer to Him or away from Him, they may indeed give us; but after they have done their best or their worst, all depends on the personal act of our own innermost being. Man or angel can affect that, but from without. The old mystics called prayer 'the flight of the lonely soul to the only God.' It is the name for all religion. These two, God and the soul, have to 'transact,' as our Puritan forefathers used to say, as if there were no other beings in the universe but only they two. Angels and principalities and powers may stand beholding with sympathetic joy; they may minister blessing and guardianship in many ways; but the decisive act of union between God and the soul they can neither effect nor prevent.

And as for them, so for men around us; the limits of their power to harm us are soon set. They may shut us out from human love by calumnies, and dig deep gulfs of alienation between us and dear ones; they may hurt and annoy us in a thousand ways with slanderous tongues, and arrows dipped in poisonous hatred, but one thing they cannot do. They may build a wall around us, and imprison us from many a joy and many a fair prospect, but they cannot put a roof on it to keep out the sweet influences from above, or hinder us from looking up to the heavens. Nobody can come between us and God but ourselves.

Or, we may turn this general thought in another direction, and say, These blessed spirits around the throne do not absorb and intercept His love. They gather about its steps in their 'solemn troops and sweet societies'; but close as are their ranks, and innumerable as is their multitude, they do not prevent that love from passing beyond them to us on the outskirts of the crowd. The planet nearest the sun is drenched and saturated with fiery brightness, but the rays from the centre of life pass on to each of the sister spheres in its turn, and travel away outwards to where the remotest of them all rolls in its far-off orbit, unknown for millenniums to dwellers closer to the sun, but through all the ages visited by warmth and light according to its needs. Like that poor, sickly woman who could lay her wasted fingers on the hem of Christ's garment, notwithstanding the thronging multitude, we can reach our hands through all the crowd, or rather He reaches His strong hand to us and heals and blesses us. All the guests are fed full at that great table. One's gain is not another's loss. The multitudes sit on the green grass, and the last man of the last fifty gets as much as the first. 'They did all eat, and were filled'; and more remains than fed them all. So all beings are 'nourished from the King's country,' and none jostle others out of their share. This healing fountain is not exhausted of its curative power by the early comers. 'I will give unto this last, even as unto thee.' 'Nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.'

III. The love of God is raised above the power of time.

'Nor things present, nor things to come,' is the Apostle's next class of powers impotent to disunite us from the love of God. The rhythmical arrangement of the text deserves to be noticed, as bearing not only on its music and rhetorical flow, but as affecting its force. We had first a pair of opposites, and then a triplet; 'death and life: angels, principalities, and powers.' We have again a pair of opposites; 'things present, things to come,' again followed by a triplet, 'height nor depth, nor any other creature.' The effect of this is to divide the whole into two, and to throw the first and second classes more closely together, as also the third and fourth. Time and Space, these two mysterious ideas, which work so fatally on all human love, are powerless here.

The great revelation of God, on which the whole of Judaism was built, was that made to Moses of the name 'I Am that I Am.' And parallel to the verbal revelation was the symbol of the Bush, burning and unconsumed, which is so often misunderstood. It appears wholly contrary to the usage of Scriptural visions, which are ever wont to express in material form the same truth which accompanies them in words, that the meaning of that vision should be, as it is frequently taken as being, the continuance of Israel unharmed by the fiery furnace of persecution. Not the continuance of Israel, but the eternity of Israel's God is the teaching of that flaming wonder. The burning Bush and the Name of the Lord proclaimed the same great truth of self-derived, self-determined, timeless, undecaying Being. And what better symbol than the bush burning, and yet not burning out, could be found of that God in whose life there is no tendency to death, whose work digs no pit of weariness into which it falls, who gives and is none the poorer, who fears no exhaustion in His spending, no extinction in His continual shining?

And this eternity of Being is no mere metaphysical abstraction. It is eternity of love, for God is love. That great stream, the pouring out of His own very inmost Being, knows no pause, nor does the deep fountain from which it flows ever sink one hair's-breadth in its pure basin.

We know of earthly loves which cannot die. They have entered so deeply into the very fabric of the soul, that like some cloth dyed in grain, as long as two threads hold together they will retain the tint. We have to thank God for such instances of love stronger than death, which make it easier for us to believe in the unchanging duration of His. But we know, too, of love that can change, and we know that all love must part. Few of us have reached middle life, who do not, looking back, see our track strewed with the gaunt skeletons of dead friendships, and dotted with 'oaks of weeping,' waving green and mournful over graves, and saddened by footprints striking away from the line of march, and leaving us the more solitary for their departure.

How blessed then to know of a love which cannot change or die! The past, the present, and the future are all the same to Him, to whom 'a thousand years,' that can corrode so much of earthly love, are in their power to change 'as one day,' and 'one day,' which can hold so few of the expressions of our love, may be 'as a thousand years' in the multitude and richness of the gifts which it can be expanded to contain. The whole of what He has been to any past, He is to us to-day. 'The God of Jacob is our refuge.' All these old-world stories of loving care and guidance may be repeated in our lives.

So we may bring the blessedness of all the past into the present, and calmly face the misty future, sure that it cannot rob us of His love.

Whatever may drop out of our vainly-clasping hands, it matters not, if only our hearts are stayed on His love, which neither things present nor things to come can alter or remove. Looking on all the flow of ceaseless change, the waste and fading, the alienation and cooling, the decrepitude and decay of earthly affection, we can lift up with gladness, heightened by the contrast, the triumphant song of the ancient Church: 'Give thanks unto the Lord: for He is good: because His mercy endureth for ever!'

IV. The love of God is present everywhere.

The Apostle ends his catalogue with a singular trio of antagonists; 'nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,' as if he had got impatient of the enumeration of impotencies, and having named the outside boundaries in space of the created universe, flings, as it were, with one rapid toss, into that large room the whole that it can contain, and triumphs over it all.

As the former clause proclaimed the powerlessness of Time, so this proclaims the powerlessness of that other great mystery of creatural life which we call Space. Height or depth, it matters not. That diffusive love diffuses itself equally in all directions. Up or down, it is all the same. The distance from the centre is the same to Zenith or to Nadir.

Here, we have the same process applied to that idea of Omnipresence as was applied in the former clause to the idea of Eternity. That thought, so hard to grasp with vividness, and not altogether a glad one to a sinful soul, is all softened and glorified, as some solemn Alpine cliff of bare rock is when the tender morning light glows on it, when it is thought of as the Omnipresence of Love. 'Thou, God, seest me,' may be a stern word, if the God who sees be but a mighty Maker or a righteous Judge. As reasonably might we expect a prisoner in his solitary cell to be glad when he thinks that the jailer's eye is on him from some unseen spy-hole in the wall, as expect any thought of God but one to make a man read that grand one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm with joy: 'If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there.' So may a man say shudderingly to himself, and tremble as he asks in vain, 'Whither shall I flee from Thy Presence?' But how different it all is when we can cast over the marble whiteness of that solemn thought the warm hue of life, and change the form of our words into this of our text: 'Nor height, nor depth, shall be able to separate us from the love of God.'

In that great ocean of the divine love we live and move and have our being, floating in it like some sea flower which spreads its filmy beauty and waves its long tresses in the depths of mid-ocean. The sound of its waters is ever in our ears, and above, beneath, around us, its mighty currents run evermore. We need not cower before the fixed gaze of some stony god, looking on us unmoved like those Egyptian deities that sit pitiless with idle hands on their laps, and wide-open lidless eyes gazing out across the sands. We need not fear the Omnipresence of Love, nor the Omniscience which knows us altogether, and loves us even as it knows. Rather we shall be glad that we are ever in His Presence, and desire, as the height of all felicity and the power for all goodness, to walk all the day long in the light of His countenance, till the day come when we shall receive the crown of our perfecting in that we shall be 'ever with the Lord.'

The recognition of this triumphant sovereignty of love over all these real and supposed antagonists makes us, too, lords over them, and delivers us from the temptations which some of them present us to separate ourselves from the love of God. They all become our servants and helpers, uniting us to that love. So we are set free from the dread of death and from the distractions incident to life. So we are delivered from superstitious dread of an unseen world, and from craven fear of men. So we are emancipated from absorption in the present and from careful thought for the future. So we are at home everywhere, and every corner of the universe is to us one of the many mansions of our Father's house. 'All things are yours, . . . and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.'

I do not forget the closing words of this great text I have not ventured to include them in our present subject, because they would have introduced another wide region of thought to be laid down on our already too narrow canvas.

But remember, I beseech you, that this love of God is explained by our Apostle to be 'in Christ Jesus our Lord.' Love illimitable, all-pervasive, eternal; yes, but a love which has a channel and a course; love which has a method and a process by which it pours itself over the world. It is not, as some representations would make it, a vague, nebulous light diffused through space as in a chaotic half-made universe, but all gathered in that great Light which rules the day—even in Him who said: 'I am the Light of the world.' In Christ the love of God is all centred and embodied that it may be imparted to all sinful and hungry hearts, even as burning coals are gathered on a hearth that they may give warmth to all that are in the house. 'God *so* loved the world'—not merely *so much*, but in *such a fashion*—'that'—that what? Many people would leap at once from the first to the last clause of the verse, and regard eternal life for all and sundry as the only adequate expression of the universal love of God. Not so does Christ speak. Between that universal love and its ultimate purpose and desire for every man He inserts two conditions, one on God's part, one on man's. God's love reaches its end, namely, the bestowal of eternal life, by means of a divine act and a human response. 'God *so* loved the world, that He *gave* His only begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' So all the universal love of God for you and me and for all our brethren is 'in Christ Jesus our Lord,' and faith in Him unites us to it by bonds which no foe can break, no shock of change can snap, no time can rot, no distance can stretch to breaking. 'For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'

THE SACRIFICE OF THE BODY

'I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.'—ROMANS xii. 1.

IN the former part of this letter the Apostle has been building up a massive fabric of doctrine, which has stood the waste of centuries, and the assaults of enemies, and has been the home of devout souls. He now passes to speak of practice, and he binds the two halves of his letter indissolubly together by that significant 'therefore,' which does not only look back to the thing last said, but to the whole of the preceding portion of the letter. 'What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.' Christian living is inseparably connected with Christian believing. Possibly the error of our forefathers was in cutting faith too much loose from practice, and supposing that an orthodox creed was sufficient, though I think the extent to which they did suppose that has been very much exaggerated. The temptation of this day is precisely the opposite. 'Conduct is three-fourths of life,' says one of our teachers. Yes. But what about the *fourth* fourth which underlies conduct? Paul's way is the right way. Lay broad and deep the foundations of God's facts revealed to us, and then build upon that the fabric of a noble life. This generation superficially tends to cut practice loose from faith, and so to look for grapes from thorns and figs from thistles. Wrong thinking will not lead to right doing. 'I beseech you, *therefore*, brethren, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice.'

The Apostle, in beginning his practical exhortations, lays as the foundations of them all two companion precepts: one, with which we have to deal, affecting mainly the outward life; its twin sister, which follows in the next verse, affecting mainly the inward life. He who has drunk in the spirit of Paul's doctrinal teaching will present his body a living sacrifice, and be renewed in the spirit of his mind; and thus, outwardly and inwardly, will be approximating to God's ideal, and all specific virtues will be his in germ. Those two precepts lay down the broad outline, and all that follow in the way of specific commandments is but filling in its details.

I. We observe that we have here, first, an all-inclusive directory for the outward life.

Now, it is to be noticed that the metaphor of sacrifice runs through the whole of the phraseology of my text. The word rendered 'present' is a technical expression for the sacerdotal action of offering. A tacit contrast is drawn between the sacrificial ritual, which was familiar to Romans as well as Jews, and the true Christian sacrifice and service. In the former a large portion of the sacrifices consisted of animals which were slain. Ours is to be 'a living sacrifice.' In the former the offering was presented to the Deity, and became His property. In the Christian service, the gift passes, in like manner, from the possession of the worshipper, and is set apart for the uses of God, for that is the proper meaning of the word 'holy.'

The outward sacrifice gave an odour of a sweet smell, which, by a strong metaphor, was declared to be fragrant in the nostrils of Deity. In like manner, the Christian sacrifice is 'acceptable unto God.' These other sacrifices were purely outward, and derived no efficacy from the disposition of the worshipper. Our sacrifice, though the material of the offering be corporeal, is the act of the inner man, and so is called 'rational' rather than 'reasonable,' as our Version has it, or as in other parts of Scripture, 'spiritual.' And the last word of my text, 'service,' retains the sacerdotal allusion, because it does not mean the service of a slave or domestic, but that of a priest.

And so the sum of the whole is that the master-word for the outward life of a Christian is sacrifice. That, again, includes two things—self-surrender and surrender to God.

Now, Paul was not such a superficial moralist as to begin at the wrong end, and talk about the surrender of the outward life, unless as the result of the prior surrender of the inward, and that priority of the consecration of the man to his offering of the body is contained in the very metaphor. For a priest needs to be consecrated before he can offer, and we in our innermost wills, in the depths of our nature, must be surrendered and set apart to God ere any of our outward activities can be laid upon His altar. The Apostle, then, does not make the mistake of substituting external for internal surrender, but he presupposes that the latter has preceded. He puts the sequence more fully in the parallel passage in this very letter: 'Yield yourselves unto God, and your bodies as instruments of righteousness unto Him.' So, then, first of all, we must be priests by our inward consecration, and then, since 'a priest must have somewhat to offer,' we must bring the outward life and lay it upon His altar.

Now, of the two thoughts which I have said are involved in this great keyword, the former is common to Christianity, with all noble systems of morality, whether religious or irreligious. It is a commonplace, on which I do not need to dwell, that every man who will live a man's life, and not that of a beast, must sacrifice the flesh, and rigidly keep it down. But that commonplace is lifted into an altogether new region, assumes a new solemnity, and finds new power for its fulfilment when we add to the moralist's duty of control of the animal and outward nature the other thought, that the surrender must be to God.

There is no need for my dwelling at any length on the various practical directions in which this great exhortation must be wrought out. It is of more importance, by far, to have well fixed in our minds and hearts the one dominant thought that sacrifice is the keyword of the Christian life than to explain the directions in which it applies. But still, just a word or two about these. There are three ways in which we may look at the body, which the Apostle here says is to be yielded up unto God.

It is the recipient of impressions from without. *There* is a field for consecration. The eye that looks upon evil, and by the look has rebellious, lustful, sensuous, foul desires excited in the heart, breaks this solemn law. The eye that among the things seen dwells with complacency on the pure, and turns from the impure as if a hot iron had been thrust into its pupil; that in the things seen discerns shimmering behind them, and manifested through them, the things unseen and eternal, is the consecrated eye. 'Art for

Art's sake,' to quote the cant of the day, has too often meant art for the flesh's sake. And there are pictures and books, and sights of various sorts, flashed before the eyes of you young men and women which it is pollution to dwell upon, and should be pain to remember. I beseech you all to have guard over these gates of the heart, and to pray, 'Turn away mine eyes from viewing vanity.' And the other senses, in like manner, have need to be closely connected with God if they are not to rush us down to the devil.

The body is not only the recipient of impressions. It is the possessor of appetites and necessities. See to it that these are indulged, with constant reference to God. It is no small attainment of the Christian life 'to eat our meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God.' In a hundred directions this characteristic of our corporeal lives tends to lead us all away from supreme consecration to Him. There is the senseless luxury of this generation. There is the exaggerated care for physical strength and completeness amongst the young; there is the intemperance in eating and drinking, which is the curse and the shame of England. There is the provision for the flesh, the absorbing care for the procuring of material comforts, which drowns the spirit in miserable anxieties, and makes men bond-slaves. There is the corruption which comes from drunkenness and from lust. There is the indolence which checks lofty aspirations and stops a man in the middle of noble work. And there are many other forms of evil on which I need not dwell, all of which are swept clean out of the way when we lay to heart this injunction: 'I beseech you present your bodies a living sacrifice,' and let appetites and tastes and corporeal needs be kept in rigid subordination and in conscious connection with Him. I remember a quaint old saying of a German schoolmaster, who apostrophised his body thus: 'I go with you three times a day to eat; you must come with me three times a day to pray.' Subjugate the body, and let it be the servant and companion of the devout spirit.

It is also, besides being the recipient of impressions, and the possessor of needs and appetites, our instrument for working in the world. And so the exhortation of my text comes to include this, that all our activities done by means of brain and eye and tongue and hand and foot shall be consciously devoted to Him, and laid as a sacrifice upon His altar. That pervasive, universally diffused reference to God, in all the details of daily life, is the thing that Christian men and women need most of all to try to cultivate. 'Pray without ceasing,' says the Apostle. This exhortation can only be obeyed if our work is indeed worship, being done by God's help, for God's sake, in communion with God.

So, dear friends, sacrifice is the keynote—meaning thereby surrender, control, and stimulus of the corporeal frame, surrender to God, in regard to the impressions which we allow to be made upon our senses, to the indulgence which we grant to our appetites, and the satisfaction which we seek for our needs, and to the activities which we engage in by means of this wondrous instrument with which God has trusted us. These are the plain principles involved in the exhortation of my text. 'He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption.' I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.' It is a good servant; it is a bad master.

II. Note, secondly, the relation between this priestly service and other kinds of worship.

I need only say a word about that. Paul is not meaning to depreciate the sacrificial ritual, from which he drew his emblem. But he is meaning to assert that the devotion of a life, manifested through bodily activity, is higher in its nature than the symbolical worship of any altar and of any sacrifice. And that falls in with prevailing tendencies in this day, which has laid such a firm hold on the principle that daily conduct is better than formal worship, that it has forgotten to ask the question whether the daily conduct is likely to be satisfactory if the formal worship is altogether neglected. I believe, as profoundly as any man can, that the true worship is distinguishable from and higher than the more sensuous forms of the Catholic or other sacramentarian churches, or the more simple of the Puritan and Nonconformist, or the altogether formless of the Quaker. I believe that the best worship is the manifold activities of daily life laid upon God's altar, so that the division between things secular and things sacred is to a large extent misleading and irrelevant. But at the same time I believe that you have very little chance of getting this diffused and all-pervasive reference of all a man's doings to God unless there are, all through his life, recurring with daily regularity, reservoirs of power, stations where he may rest, kneeling-places where the attitude of service is exchanged for the attitude of supplication; times of quiet communion with God which shall feed the worshipper's activities as the white snowfields on the high summits feed the brooks that sparkle by the way, and bring fertility wherever they run. So, dear brethren, remember that whilst life is the field of worship there must be the inward worship within the shrine if there is to be the outward service.

III. Lastly, note the equally comprehensive motive and ground of this all-inclusive directory for conduct.

'I beseech you, by the mercies of God.' That plural does not mean that the Apostle is extending his view over the whole wide field of the divine beneficence, but rather that he is contemplating the one all-inclusive mercy about which the former part of his letter has been eloquent—viz. the gift of Christ—and contemplating it in the manifoldness of the blessings which flow from it. The mercies of God which move a man to yield himself as a sacrifice are not the diffused beneficences of His providence, but the concentrated love that lies in the person and work of His Son.

And there, as I believe, is the one motive to which we can appeal with any prospect of its being powerful enough to give the needful impetus all through a life. The sacrifice of Christ is the ground on which our sacrifices can be offered and accepted, for it was the sacrifice of a death propitiatory and cleansing, and on it, as the ancient ritual taught us, may be reared the enthusiastic sacrifice of a life—a thankoffering for it.

Nor is it only the ground on which our sacrifice is accepted, but it is the great motive by which our sacrifice is impelled. *There* is the difference between the Christian teaching, 'present your bodies a sacrifice,' and the highest and noblest of similar teaching elsewhere. One of the purest and loftiest of the ancient moralists was a contemporary of Paul's. He would have re-echoed from his heart the Apostle's directory, but he knew nothing of the Apostle's motive. So his exhortations were powerless. He had no spell to work on men's hearts, and his lofty teachings were as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Whilst Seneca taught, Rome was a cesspool of moral putridity and Nero butchered. So it always is. There may be noble teachings about self-control, purity, and the like, but an evil and adulterous generation is slow to dance to such piping.

Our poet has bid us—

> 'Move upwards, casting out the beast,
> And let the ape and tiger die.'

But how is this heavy bulk of ours to 'move upwards'; how is the beast to be 'cast out'; how are the 'ape and tiger' in us to be slain? Paul has told us, 'By the mercies of God.' Christ's gift, meditated on, accepted, introduced into will and heart, is the one power that will melt our obstinacy, the one magnet that will draw us after it.

Nothing else, brethren, as your own experience has taught you, and as the experience of the world confirms, nothing else will bind Behemoth, and put a hook in his nose. Apart from the constraining motive of the love of Christ, all the cords of prudence, conscience, advantage, by which men try to bind their unruly passions and manacle the insisting flesh, are like the chains on the demoniac's wrists—'And he had oftentimes been bound by chains, and the chains were snapped asunder.' But the silken leash with which the fair Una in the poem leads the lion, the silken leash of love will bind the strong man, and enable us to rule ourselves. If we will open our hearts to the sacrifice of Christ, we shall be able to offer ourselves as thankofferings. If we will let His love sway our wills and consciences, He will give our wills and consciences power to master and to offer up our flesh

And the great change, according to which He will one day change the body of our humiliation into the likeness of the body of His glory, will be begun in us, if we live under the influence of the motive and the commandment which this Apostle bound together in our text and in his other great words, 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and spirit, which are His.'

TRANSFIGURATION

'Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.'—ROMANS xii. 2.

I HAD occasion to point out, in a sermon on the preceding verse, that the Apostle is, in this context, making the transition from the doctrinal to the practical part of his letter, and that he lays down broad principles, of which all his subsequent injunctions and exhortations are simply the filling up of the details. One master word, for the whole Christian life, as we then saw, is sacrifice, self-surrender, and that to God. In like manner, Paul here brackets, with that great conception of the Christian life, another equally dominant and equally comprehensive. In one aspect, it is self-surrender; in another, it is growing transformation. And, just as in the former verse we found that an inward surrender preceded the outward sacrifice, and that the inner man, having been consecrated as a priest, by this yielding of himself to God, was then called upon to manifest inward consecration by outward sacrifice, so in this further exhortation, an inward 'renewing of the mind' is regarded as the necessary antecedent of transformation of outward life.

So we have here another comprehensive view of what the Christian life ought to be, and that not only grasped, as it were, in its very centre and essence, but traced out in two directions—as to that which must precede it within, and as to that which follows it as consequence. An outline of the possibilities, and therefore the duties, of the Christian, is set forth here, in these three thoughts of my text, the renewed mind issuing in a transfigured life, crowned and rewarded by a clearer and ever clearer insight into what we ought to be and do.

I. Note, then, that the foundation of all transformation of character and conduct is laid deep in a renewed mind.

Now it is a matter of world-wide experience, verified by each of us in our own case, if we have ever been honest in the attempt, that the power of self-improvement is limited by very narrow bounds. Any man that has ever tried to cure himself of the most trivial habit which he desires to get rid of, or to alter in the slightest degree the set of some strong taste or current of his being, knows how little he can do, even by the most determined effort. Something may be effected, but, alas! as the proverbs of all nations and all lands have taught us, it is very little indeed. 'You cannot expel nature with a fork,' said the Roman. 'What 's bred in the bone won't come out of the flesh,' says the Englishman. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?' says the Hebrew. And we all know what the answer to that question is. The problem that is set before a man when you tell him to effect self-improvement is something like that which confronted that poor paralytic lying in the porch at the pool: 'If you can walk you will be able to get to the pool that will make you able to walk. But you have got to be cured before you can do what you need to do in order to be cured.' Only one knife can cut the knot. The Gospel of Jesus Christ presents itself, not as a mere republication of morality, not as merely a new stimulus and motive to do what is right, but as an actual communication to men of a new power to work in them, a strong hand laid upon our poor, feeble hand with which we try to put on the brake or to apply the stimulus. It is a new gift of a life which will unfold itself after its own nature, as the bud into flower, and the flower into fruit; giving new desires, tastes, directions, and renewing the whole nature. And so, says Paul, the beginning of transformation of character is the renovation in the very centre of the being, and the communication of a new impulse and power to the inward self.

Now, I suppose that in my text the word 'mind' is not so much employed in the widest sense, including all the affections and will, and the other faculties of our nature, as in the narrower sense of the perceptive power, or that faculty in our nature by which we recognise, and make our own, certain truths. 'The renewing of the mind,' then, is only, in such an interpretation, a theological way of putting the simpler English thought, a change of estimates, a new set of views; or if that word be too shallow, as indeed it is, a new set of convictions. It is profoundly true that 'As a man thinketh, so is he.' Our characters are largely made by our estimates of what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. And what the Apostle is thinking about here is, as I take it, principally how the body of Christian truth, if it effects a lodgment in, not merely the brain of a man, but his whole nature, will modify and alter it all. Why, we all know how often a whole life has been revolutionised by the sudden dawning or rising in its sky, of some starry new truth, formerly hidden and undreamed of. And if we should translate the somewhat archaic phraseology of our text into the plainest of modern English, it just comes to this: If you want to change your characters, and God knows they all need it, change the deep convictions of your mind; and get hold, as living realities, of the great truths of Christ's Gospel. If you and I really believed what we say we believe, that Jesus Christ has died for us, and lives for us, and is ready to pour out upon us the gift of His Divine Spirit, and wills that we should be like Him, and holds out to us the great and wonderful hopes and prospects of an absolutely eternal life of supreme and serene blessedness at His right hand, should we be, could we be, the sort of people that most of us are? It is not the much that you say you believe that shapes your character; it is the little that you habitually realise. Truth professed has no transforming power; truth received and fed upon can revolutionise a man's whole character.

So, dear brethren, remember that my text, though it is an analysis of the methods of Christian progress and though it is a wonderful setting forth of the possibilities open to the poorest, dwarfed, blinded, corrupted nature, is also all commandment. And if it is true that the principles of the Gospel exercise transforming power upon men's lives, and that in order for these principles to effect their natural results there must be honest dealing with them, on our parts, take this as the practical outcome of all this first part of my sermon—let us all see to it that we keep ourselves in touch with the truths which we say we believe; and that we thorough-goingly apply these truths in all their searching, revealing, quickening, curbing power, to every action of our daily lives. If for one day we could bring everything that we do into touch with the creed that we profess, we should be different men and women. Make of your every thought an action; link every action with a thought. Or, to put it more Christianlike, let there be nothing in your creed which is not in your commandments; and let nothing be in your life which is not moulded by these. The beginning of all transformation is the revolutionised conviction of a mind that has accepted the truths of the Gospel.

II. Well then, secondly, note the transfigured life.

The Apostle uses in his positive commandment, 'Be ye transformed,' the same word which is employed by two of the Evangelists in their account of our Lord's transfiguration. And although I suppose it would be going too far to assert that there is a distinct reference intended to that event, it may be permissible to look back to it as being a lovely illustration of the possibilities that open to an honest Christian life—the possibility of a change, coming from within upwards, and shedding a strange radiance on the face, whilst yet the identity remains. So by the rippling up from within of the renewed mind will come into our lives a transformation not altogether unlike that which passed on Him when His garments did shine 'so as no fuller on earth could white them'; and His face was as the sun in his strength.

The life is to be transfigured, yet it remains the same, not only in the consciousness of personal identity, but in the main trend and drift of the character. There is nothing in the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is meant to obliterate the lines of the strongly marked individuality which each of us receives by nature. Rather the Gospel is meant to heighten and deepen these, and to make each man more intensely himself, more thoroughly individual and unlike anybody else. The perfection of our nature is found in the pursuit, to the furthest point, of the characteristics of our nature, and so, by reason of diversity, there is the greater harmony, and, all taken together, will reflect less inadequately the infinite glories of which they are all partakers. But whilst the individuality remains, and ought to be heightened by Christian consecration, yet a change should pass over our lives, like the change that passes over the winter landscape when the summer sun draws out the green leaves from the hard black boughs, and flashes a fresh colour over all the brown pastures. There should be such a change as when a drop or two of ruby wine falls into a cup, and so diffuses a gradual warmth of tint over all the whiteness of the water. Christ in us, if we are true to Him, will make us more ourselves, and yet new creatures in Christ Jesus.

And the transformation is to be into His likeness who is the pattern of all perfection. We must be moulded after the same type. There are two types possible for us: this world; Jesus Christ. We have to make our choice which is to be the headline after which we are to try to write. 'They that make them are like unto them.' Men resemble their gods; men become more or less like their idols. What you conceive to be desirable you will more and more assimilate yourselves to. Christ is the Christian man's pattern; is He not better than the blind, corrupt world?

That transformation is no sudden thing, though the revolution which underlies it may be instantaneous. The working *out* of the new motives, the working *in* of the new power, is no mere work of a moment. It is a lifelong task till the lump be leavened. Michael Angelo, in his mystical way, used to say that sculpture effected its aim by the removal of parts; as if the statue lay somehow hid in the marble block. We have, day by day, to work at the task of removing the superfluities that mask its outlines. Sometimes with a heavy mallet, and a hard blow, and a broad chisel, we have to take away huge masses; sometimes, with fine tools and delicate touches, to remove a grain or two of powdered dust from the sparkling block, but always to seek more and more, by slow, patient toil, to conform ourselves to that serene type of all perfectness that we have learned to love in Jesus Christ.

And remember, brethren, this transformation is no magic change effected whilst men sleep. It is a commandment which we have to brace ourselves to perform, day by day to set ourselves to the task of more completely assimilating ourselves to our Lord. It comes to be a solemn question for each of us whether we can say, 'To-day I am liker Jesus Christ than I was yesterday; to-day the truth which renews the mind has a deeper hold upon me than it ever had before.'

But this positive commandment is only one side of the transfiguration that is to be effected. It is clear enough that if a new likeness is being stamped upon a man, the process may be looked at from the other side; and that in proportion as we become liker Jesus Christ, we shall become more unlike the old type to which we were previously conformed. And so, says Paul, 'Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed.' He does not mean to say that the non-conformity precedes the transformation. They are two sides of one process; both arising from the renewing of the mind within.

Now, I do not wish to do more than just touch most lightly upon the thoughts that are here, but I dare not pass them by altogether. 'This world' here, in my text, is more properly 'this age,' which means substantially the same thing as John's favourite word 'world,' viz. the sum total of godless men and things conceived of as separated from God, only that by this expression the essentially fleeting nature of that type is more distinctly set forth. Now the world is the world to-day just as much as it was in Paul's time. No doubt the Gospel has sweetened society; no doubt the average of godless life in England is a better thing than the average of godless life in the Roman Empire. No doubt there is a great deal of Christianity diffused through the average opinion and ways of looking at things, that prevail around us. But the world is the world still. There are maxims and ways of living, and so on, characteristic of the Christian life, which are in as complete antagonism to the ideas and maxims and practices that prevail amongst men who are outside of the influences of this Christian truth in their own hearts, as ever they were.

And although it can only be a word, I want to put in here a very earnest word which the tendencies of this generation do very specially require. It seems to be thought, by a great many people, who call themselves Christians nowadays, that the nearer they can come in life, in ways of looking at things, in estimates of literature, for instance, in customs of society, in politics, in trade, and especially in amusements—the nearer they can come to the un-Christian world, the more 'broad' (save the mark!) and 'superior to prejudice' they are. 'Puritanism,' not only in theology, but in life and conduct, has come to be at a discount in these days. And it seems to be by a great many professing Christians thought to be a great feat to walk as the mules on the Alps do, with one foot over the path and the precipice down below. Keep away from the edge. You are safer so. Although, of course, I am not talking about mere conventional dissimilarities; and though I know and believe and feel all that can be said about the insufficiency, and even insincerity, of such, yet there is a broad gulf between the man who believes in Jesus Christ and His Gospel and the man who does not, and the resulting conducts cannot be the same unless the Christian man is insincere.

III. And now lastly, and only a word, note the great reward and crown of this transfigured life.

Paul puts it in words which, if I had time, would require some commenting upon. The issue of such a life is, to put it into plain English, an increased power of perceiving, instinctively and surely, what it is God's will that we should do. And that is the reward. Just as when you take away disturbing masses of metal from near a compass, it trembles to its true point, so when, by the discipline of which I have been speaking, there are swept away from either side of us the things that would perturb our judgment, there comes as blessing and reward, a clear insight into that which it is our duty to do.

There may be many difficulties left, many perplexities. There is no promise here, nor is there anything in the tendencies of Christ-like living, to lead us to anticipate that guidance in regard to matters of prudence or expediency or temporal advantage will follow from such a transfigured life. All such matters are still to be determined in the proper fashion, by the exercise of our own best judgment and common-sense. But in the higher region, the knowledge of good and evil, surely it is a blessed reward, and one of the highest that can be given to a man, that there shall be in him so complete a harmony with God that, like God's Son, he 'does always the things that please Him,' and that the Father will show him whatsoever things Himself doeth; and that these also will the son do likewise. To know beyond doubt what I ought to do, and knowing, to have no hesitation or reluctance in doing it, seems to me to be heaven upon earth, and the man that has it needs but little more. This, then, is the reward. Each peak we climb opens wider and clearer prospects into the untravelled land before us.

And so, brethren, here is the way, the only way, by which we can change ourselves, first let us have our minds renewed by contact with the truth, then we shall be able to transform our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ, and our faces too will shine, and our lives will be ennobled, by a serene beauty which men cannot but admire, though it may rebuke them. And as the issue of all we shall have clearer and deeper insight into that will, which to know is life, in keeping of which there is great reward. And thus our apostle's promise may be fulfilled for each of us. 'We all with unveiled faces reflecting'—as a mirror does—'the glory of the Lord, are changed . . . into the same image.'

SOBER THINKING

'**For I say**, through the grace that is given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.'—ROMANS xii. 3.

It is hard to give advice without seeming to assume superiority; it is hard to take it, unless the giver identifies himself with the receiver, and shows that his counsel to others is a law for himself. Paul does so here, led by the delicate perception which comes from a loving heart, compared with which deliberate 'tact' is cold and clumsy. He wishes, as the first of the specific duties to which he invites the Roman Christians, an estimate of themselves based upon the recognition of God as the Giver of all capacities and graces, and leading to a faithful use for the general good of the 'gifts differing according to the grace given to us.' In the first words of our text, he enforces his counsel by an appeal to his apostolic authority; but he so presents it that, instead of separating himself from the Roman Christians by it, he unites himself with them. He speaks of 'the grace given to *me*,' and in verse 6 of the grace given to *us*.' He was made an Apostle by the same giving God who has bestowed varying gifts on each of *them*. He knows what is the grace which he possesses as he would have them know; and in these counsels he is assuming no superiority, but is simply using the special gift bestowed on him for the good of all. With this delicate turn of what might else have sounded harshly authoritative, putting prominently forward the divine gift and letting the man Paul to whom it was given fall into the background, he counsels as the first of the social duties which Christian men owe to one another, a sober and just estimate of themselves. This sober estimate is here regarded as being important chiefly as an aid to right service. It is immediately followed by counsels to the patient and faithful exercise of differing gifts. For thus we may know what our gifts are; and the acquisition of such knowledge is the aim of our text.

I. What determines our gifts.

Paul here gives a precise standard, or 'measure' as he calls it, according to which we are to estimate ourselves. 'Faith' is the measure of our gifts, and is itself a gift from God. The strength of a Christian man's faith determines his whole Christian character. Faith is trust, the attitude of receptivity. There are in it a consciousness of need, a yearning desire and a confidence of expectation. It is the open empty hand held up with the assurance that it will be filled; it is the empty pitcher let down into the well with the assurance that it will be drawn up filled. It is the precise opposite of the self-dependent isolation which shuts us out from God. The law of the Christian life is ever, 'according to your faith be it unto you'; 'believe that ye receive and ye have them.' So then the more faith a man exercises the more of God and Christ he has. It is the measure of our capacity, hence there may be indefinite increase in the gifts which God bestows on faithful souls. Each of us will have as much as he desires and is capable of containing. The walls of the heart are elastic, and desire expands them.

The grace given by faith works in the line of its possessor's natural faculties; but these are supernaturally reinforced and strengthened while, at the same time, they are curbed and controlled, by the divine gift and the natural gifts thus dealt with become what Paul calls *charisms.* The whole nature of a Christian should be ennobled, elevated, made more delicate and intense, when the 'Spirit of life that is in Christ Jesus' abides in and inspires it. Just as a sunless landscape is smitten into sudden beauty by a burst of sunshine which heightens the colouring of the flowers on the river's bank, and is flashed back from every silvery ripple on the stream, so the faith which brings the life of Christ into the life of the Christian makes him more of a man than he was before. So, there will be infinite variety in the resulting characters. It is the same force in various forms that rolls in the thunder or gleams in the dewdrops, that paints the butterfly's feathers or flashes in a star. All individual idiosyncrasies should be developed in the Christian Church, and will be when its members yield themselves fully to the indwelling Spirit, and can truly declare that the lives which they live in the flesh they live by the faith of the Son of God.

But Paul here regards the measure of faith as itself 'dealt to every man'; and however we may construe the grammar of this sentence there is a deep sense in which our faith is God's gift to us. We have to give equal emphasis to the two conceptions of faith as a human act and as a divine bestowal, which have so often been pitted against each other as contradictory when really they are complementary. The apparent antagonism between them is but one instance of the great antithesis to which we come to at last in reference to all human thought on the relations of man to God. 'It is He that worketh in us both to will and to do of His own good pleasure'; and all our goodness is God-given goodness, and yet it is our goodness. Every devout heart has a consciousness that the faith which knits it to God is God's work in it, and that left to itself it would have remained alienated and faithless. The consciousness that his faith was his own act blended in full harmony with the twin consciousness that it was Christ's gift, in the agonised father's prayer, 'Lord, I believe, help Thou mine unbelief.'

II. What is a just estimate of our gifts.

The Apostle tells us, negatively, that we are not to think more highly than we ought to think, and positively that we are to 'think soberly.'

To arrive at a just estimate of ourselves the estimate must ever be accompanied with a distinct consciousness that all is God's gift. That will keep us from anything in the nature of pride or over-weening self-importance. It will lead to true humility, which is not ignorance of what we can do, but recognition that we, the doers, are of ourselves but poor creatures. We are less likely to fancy that we are greater than we are when we feel that, whatever we are, God made us so. 'What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?'

Further, it is to be noted that the estimate of gifts which Paul enjoins is an estimate with a view to service. Much self-investigation is morbid, because it is self-absorbed; and much is morbid because it is undertaken only for the purpose of ascertaining one's 'spiritual condition.' Such self-examination is good enough in its way, and may sometimes be very necessary; but a testing of one's own capacities for the purpose of ascertaining what we are fit for, and what therefore it is our duty to do, is far more wholesome. Gifts are God's summons to work, and our first response to the summons should be our scrutiny of our gifts with a distinct purpose of using them for the great end for which we received them. It is well to take stock of the loaves that we have, if the result be that we bring our poor provisions to Him, and put them in His hands, that He may give them back to us so multiplied as to be more than adequate to the needs of the thousands. Such just estimate of our gifts is to be attained mainly by noting ourselves at work. Patient self-observation may be important, but is apt to be mistaken; and the true test of what we can do is what we *do* do.

The just estimate of our gifts which Paul enjoins is needful in order that we may ascertain what God has meant us to be and do, and may neither waste our strength in trying to be some one else, nor hide our talent in the napkin of ignorance or false humility. There is quite as much harm done to Christian character and Christian service by our failure to recognise what is in our power, as by ambitious or ostentatious attempts at what is above our power. We have to be ourselves as God has made us in our natural faculties, and as the new life of Christ operating on these has made us new creatures in Him not by changing but by enlarging our old natures. It matters nothing what the special form of a Christian man's service may be; the smallest and the greatest are alike to the Lord of all, and He appoints His servants' work. Whether the servant be a cup-bearer or a counsellor is of little moment. 'He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.'

The positive aspect of this right estimate of one's gifts is, if we fully render the Apostle's words, as the Revised Version does, 'so to think as to think soberly.' There is to be self-knowledge in order to 'sobriety,' which includes not only what we mean by sober-mindedness, but self-government; and this aspect of the apostolic exhortation opens out into the thought that the gifts, which a just estimate of ourselves pronounces us to possess, need to be kept bright by the continual suppression of the mind of the flesh, by putting down earthly desires, by guarding against a selfish use of them, by preventing them by rigid control from becoming disproportioned and our masters. All the gifts which Christ bestows upon His people He bestows on condition that they bind them together by the golden chain of self-control.

MANY AND ONE

'For we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5. So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.'—ROMANS xii. 4, 5.

To Paul there was the closest and most vital connection between the profoundest experiences of the Christian life and its plainest and most superficial duties. Here he lays one of his most mystical conceptions as the very foundation on which to rear the great structure of Christian conduct, and links on to one of his profoundest thoughts, the unity of all Christians in Christ, a comprehensive series of practical exhortations. We are accustomed to hear from many lips: 'I have no use for these dogmas that Paul delights in. Give me his practical teaching. You may keep the Epistle to the Romans, I hold by the thirteenth of First Corinthians.' But such an unnatural severance between the doctrine and the ethics of the Epistle cannot be effected without the destruction of both. The very principle of this Epistle to the Romans is that the difference between the law and the Gospel is, that the one preaches conduct without a basis for it, and that the other says, First believe in Christ, and in the strength of that belief, do the right and be like Him. Here, then, in the very laying of the foundation for conduct in these verses we have in concrete example the secret of the Christian way of making good men.

I. The first point to notice here is, the unity of the derived life. Many are one, because they are each in Christ, and the individual relationship and derivation of life from Him makes them one whilst continuing to be many. That great metaphor, and nowadays much forgotten and neglected truth, is to Paul's mind the fact which ought to mould the whole life and conduct of individual Christians and to be manifested therein. There are three most significant and instructive symbols by which the unity of believers in Christ Jesus is set forth in the New Testament. Our Lord Himself gives us the one of the vine and its branches, and that symbol suggests the silent, effortless process by which the life-giving sap rises and finds its way from the deep root to the furthest tendril and the far-extended growth. The same symbol loses indeed in one respect its value if we transfer it to growths more congenial to our northern climate, and instead of the vine with its rich clusters, think of some great elm, deeply rooted, and with its firm bole and massive branches, through all of which the mystery of a common life penetrates and makes every leaf in the cloud of foliage through which we look up participant of itself. But, profound and beautiful as our Lord's metaphor is, the vegetative uniformity of parts and the absence of individual characteristics make it, if taken alone, insufficient. In the tree one leaf is like another; it 'grows green and broad and takes no care.' Hence, to express the whole truth of the union between Christ and us we must bring in other figures. Thus we find the Apostle adducing the marriage tie, the highest earthly example of union, founded on choice and affection. But even that sacred bond leaves a gap between those who are knit together by it; and so we have the conception of our text, the unity of the body as representing for us the unity of believers with Jesus. This is a unity of life. He is not only head as chief and sovereign, but He is soul or life, which has its seat, not in this or that organ as old physics teach, but pervades the whole and 'filleth all in all.' The mystery which concerns the union of soul and body, and enshrouds the nature of physical life, is part of the felicity of this symbol in its Christian application. That commonest of all things, the mysterious force which makes matter live and glow under spiritual emotion, and changes the vibrations of a nerve, or the undulations of the grey brain, into hope and love and faith, eludes the scalpel and the microscope. Of man in his complex nature it is true that 'clouds and darkness are round about him,' and we may expect an equally solemn mystery to rest upon that which makes out of separate individuals one living body, animated with the life and moved by the Spirit of the indwelling

Christ. We can get no further back, and dig no deeper down, than His own words, 'I am . . . the life.'

But, though this unity is mysterious, it is most real. Every Christian soul receives from Christ the life of Christ. There is a real implantation of a higher nature which has nothing to do with sin and is alien from death. There is a true regeneration which is supernatural, and which makes all who possess it one, in the measure of their possession, as truly as all the leaves on a tree are one because fed by the same sap, or all the members in the natural body are one, because nourished by the same blood. So the true bond of Christian unity lies in the common participation of the one Lord, and the real Christian unity is a unity of derived life.

The misery and sin of the Christian Church have been, and are, that it has sought to substitute other bonds of unity. The whole weary history of the divisions and alienations between Christians has surely sufficiently, and more than sufficiently, shown the failure of the attempts to base Christian oneness upon uniformity of opinion, or of ritual, or of purpose. The difference between the real unity, and these spurious attempts after it, is the difference between bundles of faggots, dead and held together by a cord, and a living tree lifting its multitudinous foliage towards the heavens. The bundle of faggots may be held together in some sort of imperfect union, but is no exhibition of unity. If visible churches must be based on some kind of agreement, they can never cover the same ground as that of 'the body of Christ.'

That oneness is independent of our organisations, and even of our will, since it comes from the common possession of a common life. Its enemies are not divergent opinions or forms, but the evil tempers and dispositions which impede, or prevent, the flow into each Christian soul of the uniting 'Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' which makes the many who may be gathered into separate folds one flock clustered around the one Shepherd. And if that unity be thus a fundamental fact in the Christian life and entirely apart from external organisation, the true way to increase it in each individual is, plainly, the drawing nearer to Him, and the opening of our spirits so as to receive fuller, deeper, and more continuous inflows from His own inexhaustible fullness. In the old Temple stood the seven-branched candlestick, an emblem of a formal unity; in the new the seven candlesticks are one, because Christ stands in the midst. He makes the body one; without Him it is a carcase.

II. The diversity.

'We have many members in one body, but all members have not the same office.' Life has different functions in different organs. It is light in the eye, force in the arm, music on the tongue, swiftness in the foot; so also is Christ. The higher a creature rises in the scale of life, the more are the parts differentiated. The lowest is a mere sac, which performs all the functions that the creature requires; the highest is a man with a multitude of organs, each of which is definitely limited to one office. In like manner the division of labour in society measures its advance; and in like manner in the Church there is to be the widest diversity. What the Apostle designates as 'gifts' are natural characteristics heightened by the Spirit of Christ; the effect of the common life in each ought to be the intensifying and manifestation of individuality of character. In the Christian ideal of humanity there is place for every variety of gifts. The flora of the Mountain of God yields an endless multiplicity of growths on its ascending slopes which pass through every climate. There ought to be a richer diversity in the Church than anywhere besides; that tree should 'bear twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month for the healing of the nations.' 'All flesh is not the same flesh.' 'Star differeth from star in glory.'

The average Christian life of to-day sorely fails in two things: in being true to itself, and in tolerance of diversities. We are all so afraid of being ticketed as 'eccentric,' 'odd,' that we oftentimes stifle the genuine impulses of the Spirit of Christ leading us to the development of unfamiliar types of goodness, and the undertaking of unrecognised forms of service. If we trusted in Christ in ourselves more, and took our laws from His whispers, we should often reach heights of goodness which tower above us now, and discover in ourselves capacities which slumber undiscerned. There is a dreary monotony and uniformity amongst us which impoverishes us, and weakens the testimony that we bear to the quickening influence of the Spirit that is in Christ Jesus; and we all tend to look very suspiciously at any man who 'puts all the others out' by being himself, and letting the life that he draws from the Lord dictate its own manner of expression. It would breathe a new life into all our Christian communities if we allowed full scope to the diversities of operation, and realised that in them all there was the one Spirit. The world condemns originality: the Church should have learned to prize it. 'One after this fashion, and one after that,' is the only wholesome law of the development of the manifold graces of the Christian life.

III. The harmony.

'We being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.' That expression is remarkable, for we might have expected to read rather members *of the body*, than *of each other*; but the bringing in of such an idea suggests most emphatically that thought of the mutual relation of each part of the great whole, and that each has offices to discharge for the benefit of each. In the Christian community, as in an organised body, the active co-operation of all the parts is the condition of health. All the rays into which the spectrum breaks up the pure white light must be gathered together again in order to produce it; just as every instrument in the great orchestra contributes to the volume of sound. The Lancashire hand-bell ringers may illustrate this point for us. Each man picks up his own bell from the table and sounds his own note at the moment prescribed by the score, and so the whole of the composer's idea is reproduced. To suppress diversities results in monotony; to combine them is the only sure way to secure harmony. Nor must we forget that the indwelling life of the Church can only be manifested by the full exhibition and freest possible play of all the forms which that life assumes in individual character. It needs all, and more than all, the types of mental characteristics that can be found in humanity to mirror the infinite beauty of the indwelling Lord. 'There are diversities of operations,' and all those diversities but partially represent that same Lord 'who worketh all in all,' and Himself is more than all, and, after all manifestation through human characters, remains hinted at rather than declared, suggested but not revealed.

Still further, only by the exercise of possible diversities is the one body nourished, for each member drawing life directly and without the intervention of any other from Christ the Source, draws also from his fellow-Christian some form of the common life that to himself is unfamiliar, and needs human intervention in order to its reception. Such dependence upon one's brethren is not inconsistent with a primal dependence on Christ alone, and is a safeguard against the cultivating of one's own idiosyncrasies till they become diseased and disproportionate. The most slenderly endowed Christian soul has the double charge of giving to, and receiving from, its brethren. We have all something which we can contribute to the general stock. We have all need to supplement our own peculiar gifts by brotherly ministration. The prime condition of Christian vitality has been set forth for ever by the gracious invitation, which is also an imperative command, 'Abide in Me and I in you'; but they who by such abiding are recipients of a communicated life are not thereby isolated, but united to all who like them have received 'the manifestation of the Spirit to do good with.'

GRACE AND GRACES

'Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; 7. Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; 8. Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.'—ROMANS xii. 6-8.

THE Apostle here proceeds to build upon the great thought of the unity of believers in the one body a series of practical exhortations. In the first words of our text, he, with characteristic delicacy, identifies himself with the Roman Christians as a recipient, like them, of 'the grace that is given to us,' and as, therefore, subject to the same precepts which he commends to them. He does not stand isolated by the grace that is given to him; nor does he look down as from the height of his apostleship on the multitude below, saying to them,—Go. As one of themselves he stands amongst them, and with brotherly exhortation says,—Come. If that had been the spirit in which all Christian teachers had besought men, their exhortations would less frequently have been breath spent in vain.

We may note

I. The grace that gives the gifts.

The connection between these two is more emphatically suggested by the original Greek, in which the word for 'gifts' is a derivative of that for 'grace.' The relation between these two can scarcely be verbally reproduced in English; but it may be, though imperfectly, suggested by reading 'graces' instead of 'gifts.' The gifts are represented as being the direct product of, and cognate with, the grace bestowed. As we have had already occasion to remark, they are in Paul's language a designation of natural capacities strengthened by the access of the life of the Spirit of Christ. As a candle plunged in a vase of oxygen leaps up into more brilliant flame, so all the faculties of the human soul are made a hundred times themselves when the quickening power of the life of Christ enters into them.

It is to be observed that the Apostle here assumes that every Christian possesses, in some form, that grace which gives graces. To him a believing soul without Christ-given gifts is a monstrosity. No one is without some graces, and therefore no one is without some duties. No one who considers the multitude of professing Christians who hamper all our churches to-day, and reflects on the modern need to urge on the multitude of idlers forms of Christian activity, will fail to recognise signs of terribly weakened vitality. The humility, which in response to all invitations to work for Christ pleads unfitness is, if true, more tragical than it at first seems, for it is a confession that the man who alleges it has no real hold of the Christ in whom he professes to trust. If a Christian man is fit for no Christian work, it is time that he gravely ask himself whether he has any Christian life. 'Having gifts' is the basis of all the Apostle's exhortations. It is to him inconceivable that any Christian should not possess, and be conscious of possessing, some endowment from the life of Christ which will fit him for, and bind him to, a course of active service.

The universality of this possession is affirmed, if we note that, according to the Greek, it was 'given' at a special time in the experience of each of these Roman Christians. The rendering 'was given' might be more accurately exchanged for 'has been given,' and that expression is best taken as referring to a definite moment in the history of each believer namely, his conversion. When we 'yield ourselves to God,' as Paul exhorts us to do in the beginning of this chapter, as the commencement of all true life of conformity to His will, Christ yields Himself to us. The possession of these gifts of grace is no prerogative of officials; and, indeed, in all the exhortations which follow there is no reference to officials, though of course such were in existence in the Roman Church. They had their special functions and special qualifications for these. But what Paul is dealing with now is the grace that is inseparable from individual surrender to Christ, and has been bestowed upon all who are His. To limit the gifts to officials, and to suppose that the universal gifts in any degree militate against the recognition of officials in the Church, are equally mistakes, and confound essentially different subjects.

II. The graces that flow from the grace.

The Apostle's catalogue of these is not exhaustive, nor logically arranged; but yet a certain loose order may be noted, which may be profitable for us to trace. They are in number seven—the sacred number; and are capable of being divided, as so many of the series of sevens are, into two portions, one containing four and the other three. The former include more public works, to each of which a man might be specially devoted as his life work for and in the Church. Three are more private, and may be conceived to have a wider relation to the world. There are some difficulties of construction and rendering in the list, which need not concern us here; and we may substantially follow the Authorised Version.

The first group of four seems to fall into two pairs, the first of which, 'prophecy' and 'ministry,' seem to be bracketed together by reason of the difference between them. Prophecy is a very high form of special inspiration, and implies a direct reception of special revelation, but not necessarily of future events. The prophet is usually coupled in Paul's writings with the apostle, and was obviously amongst those to whom was given one of the highest forms of the gifts of Christ. It is very beautiful to note that by natural contrast the Apostle at once passes to one of the forms of service which a vulgar estimate would regard as remotest from the special revelation of the prophet, and is confined to lowly service. Side by side with the exalted gift of prophecy Paul puts the lowly gift of ministry. Very significant is the juxtaposition of these two extremes. It teaches us that the lowliest office is as truly allotted by Jesus as the most sacred, and that His highest gifts find an adequate field for manifestation in him who is servant of all. Ministry to be rightly discharged needs spiritual character. The original seven were men 'full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,' though all they had to do was to hand their pittances to poor widows. It may be difficult to decide for what reason other than the emphasising of this contrast the Apostle links together ministry and prophecy, and so breaks a natural sequence which would have connected the second pair of graces with the first member of the first pair. We should have expected that here, as elsewhere, 'prophet,' 'teacher,' exhorter,' would have been closely connected, and there seems no reason why they should not have been so, except that which we have suggested, namely, the wish to bring together the highest and the lowest forms of service.

The second pair seem to be linked together by likeness. The 'teacher' probably had for his function, primarily, the narration of the facts of the Gospel, and the setting forth in a form addressed chiefly to the understanding the truths thereby revealed; whilst the 'exhorter' rather addressed himself to the will, presenting the same truth, but in forms more intended to influence the emotions. The word here rendered 'exhort' is found in Paul's writings as bearing special meanings, such as consoling, stimulating, encouraging.

rebuking and others. Of course these two forms of service would often be associated, and each would be imperfect when alone; but it would appear that in the early Church there were persons in whom the one or the other of these two elements was so preponderant that their office was thereby designated. Each received a special gift from the one Source. The man who could only say to his brother, 'Be of good cheer,' was as much the recipient of the Spirit as the man who could connect and elaborate a systematic presentation of the truths of the Gospel.

These four graces are followed by a group of three, which may be regarded as being more private, as not pointing to permanent offices so much as to individual acts. They are 'giving,' 'ruling,' 'showing pity,' concerning which we need only note that the second of these can hardly be the ecclesiastical office, and that it stands between two which are closely related, as if it were of the same kind. The gifts of money, or of direction, or of pity, are one in kind. The right use of wealth comes from the gift of God's grace; so does the right use of any sway which any of us have over any of our brethren; and so does the glow of compassion, the exercise of the natural human sympathy which belongs to all, and is deepened and made tenderer and intenser by the gift of the Spirit. It would be a very different Church, and a very different world, if Christians, who were not conscious of possessing gifts which made them fit to be either prophets, or teachers, or exhorters, and were scarcely endowed even for any special form of ministry, felt that a gift from their hands, or a wave of pity from their hearts, was a true token of the movement of God's Spirit on their spirits. The fruit of the Spirit is to be found in the wide fields of everyday life, and the vine bears many clusters for the thirsty lips of wearied men who may little know what gives them their bloom and sweetness. It would be better for both giver and receiver if Christian beneficence were more clearly recognised as one of the manifestations of spiritual life.

III. The exercise of the graces.

There are some difficulties in reference to the grammatical construction of the words of our text, into which it is not necessary that we should enter here. We may substantially follow the Authorised and Revised Versions in supplying verbs in the various clauses, so as to make of the text a series of exhortations. The first of these is to 'prophesy according to the proportion of faith'; a commandment which is best explained by remembering that in the preceding verse 'the measure of faith' has been stated as being the measure of the gifts. The prophet then is to exercise his gifts in proportion to his faith. He is to speak his convictions fully and openly, and to let his utterances be shaped by the indwelling life. This exhortation may well sink into the heart of preachers in this day. It is but the echo of Jeremiah's strong words: 'He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as fire, saith the Lord, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' The ancient prophet's woe falls with double weight on those who use their words as a veil to obscure their real beliefs, and who prophesy, not 'according to the proportion of faith,' but according to the expectations of the hearers, whose faith is as vague as theirs.

In the original, the next three exhortations are alike in grammatical construction, which is represented in the Authorised Version by the supplement 'let us wait on,' and in the Revised Version by 'let us give ourselves to'; we might with advantage substitute for either the still more simple form 'be in,' after the example of Paul's exhortation to Timothy 'be in these things'; that is, as our Version has it, 'give thyself wholly to them.' The various gifts are each represented as a sphere within which its possessor is to move, for the opportunities for the exercise of which he is carefully to watch, and within the limits of which he is humbly to keep. That general law applies equally to ministry, and teaching and exhorting. We are to seek to discern our spheres; we are to be occupied with, if not absorbed in, them. At the least we are diligently to use the gift which we discover ourselves to possess, and thus filling our several spheres, we are to keep within them, recognising that each is sacred as the manifestation of God's will for each of us. The divergence of forms is unimportant, and it matters nothing whether 'the Giver of all' grants less or more. The main thing is that each be faithful in the administration of what he has received, and not seek to imitate his brother who is diversely endowed, or to monopolise for himself another's gifts. To insist that our brethren's gifts should be like ours, and to try to make ours like theirs, are equally sins against the great truth, of which the Church as a whole is the example, that there are 'diversities of operations but the same Spirit.'

The remaining three exhortations are in like manner thrown together by a similarity of construction in which the personality of the doer is put in the foreground, and the emphasis of the commandment is rested on the manner in which the grace is exercised. The reason for that may be that in these three especially the manner will show the grace. 'Giving' is to be 'with simplicity.' There are to be no sidelong looks to self-interest; no flinging of a gift from a height, as a bone might be flung to a dog; no seeking for gratitude; no ostentation in the gift. Any taint of such mixed motives as these infuses poison into our gifts, and makes them taste bitter to the receiver, and recoil in hurt upon ourselves. To 'give with simplicity' is to give as God gives.

'Diligence' is the characteristic prescribed for the man that rules. We have already pointed out that this exhortation includes a much wider area than that of any ecclesiastical officials. It points to another kind of rule, and the natural gifts needed for any kind of rule are diligence and zeal. Slackly-held reins make stumbling steeds; and any man on whose shoulders is laid the weight of government is bound to feel it as a weight. The history of many a nation, and of many a family, teaches that where the rule is slothful all evils grow apace; and it is that natural energy and earnestness, deepened and hallowed by the Christian life, which here is enjoined as the true Christian way of discharging the function of ruling, which, in some form or another, devolves on almost all of us.

'He that showeth mercy with cheerfulness.' The glow of natural human sympathy is heightened so as to become a 'gift,' and the way in which it is exercised is defined as being 'with cheerfulness.' That injunction is but partially understood if it is taken to mean no more than that sympathy is not to be rendered grudgingly, or as by necessity. No sympathy is indeed possible on such terms; unless the heart is in it, it is nought.

And that it should thus flow forth spontaneously wherever sorrow and desolation evoke it, there must be a continual repression of self, and a heart disengaged from the entanglements of its own circumstances, and at leisure to make a brother's burden its very own. But the exhortation may, perhaps, rather mean that the truest sympathy carries a bright face into darkness, and comes like sunshine in a shady place.

LOVE THAT CAN HATE

'Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. 10. In love of the brethren be tenderly affectioned one to another: in honour preferring one another.'—ROMANS xii. 9-10 (R.V.).

THUS far the Apostle has been laying down very general precepts and principles of Christian morals. Starting with the one all-comprehensive thought of self-sacrifice as the very foundation of all goodness, of transformation as its method, and of the clear knowledge of our several powers and faithful stewardship of these, as its conditions, he here proceeds to a series of more specific exhortations, which at first sight seem to be very unconnected, but through which there may be discerned a sequence of thought.

The clauses of our text seem at first sight strangely disconnected. The first and the last belong to the same subject, but the intervening clause strikes a careless reader as out of place and heterogeneous. I think that we shall see it is not so; but for the present we but note that here are three sets of precepts which enjoin, first, honest love; then, next, a healthy vehemence against evil and for good; and finally, a brotherly affection and mutual respect.

I. Let love be honest.

Love stands at the head, and is the fontal source of all separate individualised duties. Here Paul is not so much prescribing love as describing the kind of love which he recognises as genuine, and the main point on which he insists is sincerity. The 'dissimulation' of the Authorised Version only covers half the ground. It means, hiding what one is; but there is simulation, or pretending to be what one is not. There are words of love which are like the iridescent scum on the surface veiling the black depths of a pool of hatred. A Psalmist complains of having to meet men whose words were 'smoother than butter' and whose true feelings were as 'drawn swords'; but, short of such consciously lying love, we must all recognise as a real danger besetting us all, and especially those of us who are naturally inclined to kindly relations with our fellows, the tendency to use language just a little in excess of our feelings. The glove is slightly stretched, and the hand in it is not quite large enough to fill it. There is such a thing, not altogether unknown in Christian circles, as benevolence, which is largely cant, and words of conventional love about individuals which do not represent any corresponding emotion. Such effusive love pours itself in words, and is most generally the token of intense selfishness. Any man who seeks to make his words a true picture of his emotions must be aware that few harder precepts have ever been given than this brief one of the Apostle's, 'Let love be without hypocrisy.'

But the place where this exhortation comes in the apostolic sequence here may suggest to us the discipline through which obedience to it is made possible. There is little to be done by the way of directly increasing either the fervour of love or the honesty of its expression. The true method of securing both is to be growingly transformed by 'the renewing of our minds,' and growingly to bring our whole old selves under the melting and softening influence of 'the mercies of God.' It is swollen self-love, 'thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think,' which impedes the flow of love to others, and it is in the measure in which we receive into our minds 'the mind that was in Christ Jesus,' and look at men as He did, that we shall come to love them all honestly and purely. When we are delivered from the monstrous oppression and tyranny of self, we have hearts capable of a Christlike and Christ-giving love to all men, and only they who have cleansed their hearts by union with Him, and by receiving into them the purging influence of His own Spirit, will be able to love without hypocrisy.

II. Let love abhor what is evil, and cleave to what is good.

If we carefully consider this apparently irrelevant interruption in the sequence of the apostolic exhortations, we shall, I think, see at once that the irrelevance is only apparent, and that the healthy vehemence against evil and resolute clinging to good is as essential to the noblest forms of Christian love as is the sincerity enjoined in the previous clause. To detest the one and hold fast by the other are essential to the purity and depth of our love. Evil is to be loathed, and good to be clung to in our own moral conduct, and wherever we see them. These two precepts are not mere tautology, but the second of them is the ground of the first. The force of our recoil from the bad will be measured by the firmness of our grasp of the good; and yet, though inseparably connected, the one is apt to be easier to obey than is the other. There are types of Christian men to whom it is more natural to abhor the evil than to cleave to the good; and there are types of character of which the converse is true. We often see men very earnest and entirely sincere in their detestation of meanness and wickedness, but very tepid in their appreciation of goodness. To hate is, unfortunately, more congenial with ordinary characters than to love; and it is more facile to look down on badness than to look up at goodness.

But it needs ever to be insisted upon, and never more than in this day of spurious charity and unprincipled toleration, that a healthy hatred of moral evil and of sin, wherever found and however garbed, ought to be the continual accompaniment of all vigorous and manly cleaving to that which is good. Unless we shudderingly recoil from contact with the bad in our own lives, and refuse to christen it with deceptive euphemisms when we meet it in social and civil life, we shall but feebly grasp, and slackly hold, that which is good. Such energy of moral recoil from evil is perfectly consistent with honest love, for it is things, not men, that we are to hate; and it is needful as the completion and guardian of love itself. There is always danger that love shall weaken the condemnation of wrong, and modern liberality, both in the field of opinion and in regard to practical life, has so far condoned evil as largely to have lost its hold upon good. The criminal is pitied rather than blamed, and a multitude of agencies are so occupied in elevating the wrong-doers that they lose sight of the need of punishing.

Nor is it only in reference to society that this tendency works harm. The effect of it is abundantly manifest in the fashionable ideas of God and His character. There are whole schools of opinion which practically strike out of their ideal of the Divine Nature abhorrence of evil, and, little as they think it, are thereby fatally impoverishing their ideal of God, and making it impossible to understand His government of the world. As always, so in this matter, the authentic revelation of the Divine Nature, and the perfect pattern for the human are to be found in Jesus Christ. We recall that wonderful incident, when on His last approach to Jerusalem, rounding the shoulder of the Mount of Olives, He beheld the city, gleaming in the morning sunshine across the valley, and forgetting His own sorrow, shed tears over its approaching desolation, which yet He steadfastly pronounced. His loathing of evil was whole-souled and absolute, and equally intense and complete was His cleaving to that which is good. In both, and in the harmony between them, He makes God known, and prescribes and holds forth the ideal of perfect humanity to men.

III. Let sincere and discriminating love be concentrated on Christian men.

In the final exhortation of our text 'the love of the brethren' takes the place of the more diffused and general love enjoined in the first clause. The expression 'kindly affectioned' is the rendering of a very eloquent word in the original in which the instinctive love of a mother to her child, or the strange mystical ties which unite members of a family together, irrespective of their differences of character and temperament, are taken as an example after which Christian men are to mould their relations to one another. The love which is without hypocrisy, and is to be diffused on all sides, is also to be gathered together and concentrated with special energy on all who 'call upon Jesus Christ as Lord, both their Lord and ours.' The more general precept and the more particular are in perfect harmony, however our human weakness sometimes confuses them. It is obvious that this final precept of our text will be the direct result of the two preceding, for the love which has learned to be moral, hating evil, and clinging to good as necessary, when directed to possessors of like precious faith will thrill with the consciousness of a deep mystical bond of union, and will effloresce in all brotherly love and kindly affections. They who are like one another in the depths of their moral life, who are touched by like aspirations after like holy things, and who instinctively recoil with similar revulsion from like abominations, will necessarily feel the drawing of a unity far deeper and sacreder than any superficial likenesses of race, or circumstance, or opinion. Two men who share, however imperfectly, in Christ's Spirit are more akin in the realities of their nature, however they may differ on the surface, than either of them is to another, however like he may seem, who is not a partaker in the life of Christ.

This instinctive, Christian love, like all true and pure love, is to manifest itself by 'preferring one another in honour'; or as the word might possibly be rendered, 'anticipating one another.' We are not to wait to have our place assigned before we give our brother his. There will be no squabbling for the chief seat in the synagogue, or the uppermost rooms at the feast, where brotherly love marshals the guests. The one cure for petty jealousies and the miserable strife for recognition, which we are all tempted to engage in, lies in a heart filled with love of the brethren because of its love to the Elder Brother of them all, and to the Father who is His Father as well as ours. What a contrast is presented between the practice of Christians and these precepts of Paul! We may well bow ourselves in shame and contrition when we read these clear-drawn lines indicating what we ought to be, and set by the side of them the blurred and blotted pictures of what we are. It is a painful but profitable task to measure ourselves against Paul's ideal of Christ's commandment; but it will only be profitable if it brings us to remember that Christ gives before He commands, and that conformity with His ideal must begin, not with details of conduct, or with emotion, however pure, but with yielding ourselves to the God who moves us by His mercies, and being 'transformed by the renewing of our minds' and 'the indwelling of Christ in our hearts by faith.'

A TRIPLET OF GRACES

'Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.'—ROMANS xii. 11.

PAUL believed that Christian doctrine was meant to influence Christian practice; and therefore, after the fundamental and profound exhibition of the central truths of Christianity which occupies the earlier portion of this great Epistle, he tacks on, with a 'therefore' to his theological exposition, a series of plain, practical teachings. The place where conduct comes in in the letter is profoundly significant, and, if the significance of it had been observed and the spirit of it carried into practice, there would have been less of a barren orthodoxy, and fewer attempts at producing righteous conduct without faith.

But not only is the place where this series of exhortations occur very significant, but the order in which they appear is also instructive. The great principle which covers all conduct, and may be broken up into all the minutenesses of practical directions is self-surrender. Give yourselves up to God; that is the Alpha and the Omega of all goodness, and wherever that foundation is really laid, on it will rise the fair building of a life which is a temple, adorned with whatever things are lovely and of good report. So after Paul has laid deep and broad the foundation of all Christian virtue in his exhortation to present ourselves as living sacrifices, he goes on to point out the several virtues in which such self-surrender will manifest itself. There runs through the most of these exhortations an arrangement in triplets—three sister Graces linked together hand-in-hand as it were—and my text presents an example of that threefoldness in grouping. 'Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.'

I. We have, first, the prime grace of Christian diligence.

'Not slothful in business' suggests, by reason of our modern restriction of that word 'business' to a man's daily occupation, a much more limited range to this exhortation than the Apostle meant to give it. The idea which is generally drawn from these words by English readers is that they are to do their ordinary work diligently, and, all the while, notwithstanding the cooling or distracting influences of their daily avocations, are to keep themselves 'fervent in spirit.' That is a noble and needful conception of the command, but it does not express what is in the Apostle's mind. He does not mean by 'business' a trade or profession, or daily occupation. But the word means 'zeal' or 'earnestness.' And what Paul says is just this—'In regard to your earnestness in all directions, see that you are not slothful.'

The force and drift of the whole precept is just the exhortation to exercise the very homely virtue of diligence, which is as much a condition of growth and maturity in the Christian as it is in any other life. The very homeliness and obviousness of the duty causes us often to lose sight of its imperativeness and necessity.

Many of us, if we would sit quietly down and think of how we go about our 'business,' as we call it, and of how we go about our Christian life, which ought to be our highest business, would have great cause for being ashamed. We begin the one early in the morning, we keep hard at it all day, our eyes are wide open to see any opening where money is to be made; that is all right. We give our whole selves to our work whilst we are at it; that is as it should be. But why are there not the same concentration, the same wide-awakeness, the same open-eyed eagerness to find out ways of advancement, the same resolved and continuous and all-comprehending and dominating enthusiasm about our Christianity as there is about our shop, or our mill, or our success as students? Why are we all fire in the one case and all ice in the other? Why do we think that it is enough to lift the burden that Christ lays upon us with one languid finger, and to put our whole hand, or rather, as the prophet says, 'both hands earnestly,' to the task of lifting the load of daily work? 'In your earnestness be not slothful.'

Brethren, that is a very homely exhortation. I wonder how many of us can say, 'Lord! I have heard, and I have obeyed Thy precept.'

II. Diligence must be fed by a fervent spirit.

The word translated 'fervent' is literally boiling. The metaphor is very plain and intelligible. The spirit brought into contact with Christian truth and with the fire of the Holy Spirit will naturally have its temperature raised, and will be moved by the warm touch as heat makes water in a pot hung above a fire boil. Such emotion, produced by the touch of the fiery Spirit of God, is what Paul desires for, and enjoins on, all Christians; for such emotion is the only way by which the diligence, without which no Christian progress will be made, can be kept up.

No man will work long at a task that his heart is not in; or if he does, because he is obliged, the work will be slavery. In order, then, that diligence may neither languish and become slothfulness, nor be felt to be a heavy weight and an unwelcome necessity, Paul here bids us see to it that our hearts are moved because there is a fire below which makes 'the soul's depths boil in earnest.'

Now, of course, I know that, as a great teacher has told us, 'The gods approve the depth and not the tumult of the soul,' and I know that there is a great deal of emotional Christianity which is worth nothing. But it is not that kind of fervour that the Apostle is enjoining here. Whilst it is perfectly true that mere emotion often does co-exist with, and very often leads to, entire negligence as to possessing and manifesting practical excellence, the true relation between these is just the opposite—viz. that this fervour of which I speak, this wide-awakeness and enthusiasm of a spirit all quickened into rapidity of action by the warmth which it has felt from God in Christ, should drive the wheels of life. Boiling water makes steam, does it not? And what is to be done with the steam that comes off the 'boiling' spirit? You may either let it go roaring through a waste-pipe and do nothing but make a noise and be idly dissipated in the air, or you may lead it into a cylinder and make it lift a piston, and then you will get work out of it. That is what the Apostle desires us to do with our emotion. The lightning goes careering through the sky, but we have harnessed it to tram-cars nowadays, and made it 'work for its living,' to carry our letters and light our rooms. Fervour of a Christian spirit is all right when it is yoked to Christian work, and made to draw what else is a heavy chariot. It is not emotion, but it is indolent emotion, that is the curse of much of our 'fervent' Christianity.

There cannot be too much fervour. There may be too little outlet provided for the fervour to work in. It may all go off in comfortable feeling, in enthusiastic prayers and 'Amens!' and 'So be it, Lords!' and the like, or it may come with us into our daily tasks, and make us buckle to with more earnestness, and more continuity. Diligence driven by earnestness, and fervour that works, are the true things.

And surely, surely there cannot be any genuine Christianity — certainly there cannot be any deep Christianity—which is not fervent.

We hear from certain quarters of the Church a great deal about the virtue of moderation. But it seems to me that, if you take into account what Christianity tells us, the 'sober' feeling is fervent feeling, and tepid feeling is imperfect feeling. I cannot understand any man believing as plain matter-of-fact the truths on which the whole New Testament insists, and keeping himself 'cool,' or, as our friends call it, 'moderate.'

Brethren, enthusiasm—which properly means the condition of being dwelt in by a god—is the wise, the reasonable attitude of Christian men, if they believe their own Christianity and are really serving Jesus Christ. They should be 'diligent in business, fervent' —boiling—in spirit.

III. The diligence and the fervency are both to be animated by the thought, 'Serving the Lord!'

Some critics, as many of you know, no doubt, would prefer to read this verse in its last clause 'serving the time.' But that seems to me a very lame and incomplete climax for the Apostle's thought, and it breaks entirely the sequence which, as I think, is discernible in it. Much rather, he here, in the closing member of the triplet, suggests a thought which will be stimulus to the diligence and fuel to the fire that makes the spirit boil.

In effect he says, 'Think, when your hands begin to droop, and when your spirits begin to be cold and indifferent, and languor to steal over you, and the paralysing influences of the commonplace and the familiar, and the small begin to assert themselves—think that you are serving the Lord.' Will that not freshen you up? Will that not set you boiling again? Will it not be easy to be diligent when we feel that we are 'ever in the great Taskmaster's eye'? There are many reasons for diligence—the greatness of the work, for it is no small matter for us to get the whole lump of our nature leavened with the good leaven; the continual operation of antagonistic forces which are all round us, and are working night-shifts as well as day ones, whether we as Christians are on short time or not, the brevity of the period during which we have to work, and the tremendous issues which depend upon the completeness of our service here—all these things are reasons for our diligence. But *the* reason is: 'Thou Christ hast died for me, and livest for me; truly I am Thy slave.' That is the thought that will make a man bend his back to his work, whatever it be, and bend his will to his work, too, however unwelcome it may be; and that is the thought that will stir his whole spirit to fervour and earnestness, and thus will deliver him from the temptations to languid and perfunctory work that ever creep over us.

You can carry that motive—as we all know, and as we all forget when the pinch comes—into your shop, your study, your office, your mill, your kitchen, or wherever you go. 'On the bells of the horses there shall be written, Holiness to the Lord,' said the prophet, and 'every bowl in Jerusalem' may be sacred as the vessels of the altar. All life may flash into beauty, and tower into greatness, and be smoothed out into easiness, and the crooked things may be made straight and the rough places plain, and the familiar and the trite be invested with freshness and wonder as of a dream, if only we write over them, 'For the sake of the Master.' Then, whatever we do or bear, be it common, insignificant, or unpleasant, will change its aspect, and all will be sweet. Here is the secret of diligence and of fervency, 'I set the Lord always before me.'

ANOTHER TRIPLET OF GRACES

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.'

ROMANS xii. 12.

THESE three closely connected clauses occur, as you all know, in the midst of that outline of the Christian life with which the Apostle begins the practical part of this Epistle. Now, what he omits in this sketch of Christian duty seems to me quite as significant as what he inserts. It is very remarkable that in the twenty verses devoted to this subject, this is the only one which refers to the inner secrets of the Christian life. Paul's notion of 'deepening the spiritual life' was 'Behave yourself better in your relation to other people.' So all the rest of this chapter is devoted to inculcating our duties to one another. Conduct is all-important. An orthodox creed is valuable if it influences action, but not otherwise. Devout emotion is valuable, if it drives the wheels of life, but not otherwise. Christians should make efforts to attain to clear views and warm feelings, but the outcome and final test of both is a daily life of visible imitation of Jesus. The deepening of spiritual life should be manifested by completer, practical righteousness in the market-place and the street and the house, which non-Christians will acknowledge.

But now, with regard to these three specific exhortations here, I wish to try to bring out their connection as well as the force of each of them.

I. So I remark first, that the Christian life ought to be joyful because it is hopeful.

Now, I do not suppose that many of us habitually recognise it as a Christian duty to be joyful. We think that it is a matter of temperament and partly a matter of circumstance. We are glad when things go well with us. If we have a sunny disposition, and are naturally light-hearted, all the better; if we have a melancholy or morose one, all the worse. But do we recognise this, that a Christian who is not joyful is not living up to his duty; and that there is no excuse, either in temperament or in circumstances, for our not being so, and always being so? 'Rejoice in the Lord alway,' says Paul; and then, as if he thought, 'Some of you will be thinking that that is a very rash commandment, to aim at a condition quite impossible to make constant,' he goes on—'and, to convince you that I do not say it hastily, I will repeat it—"and again I say, rejoice."' Brethren, we shall have to alter our conceptions of what true gladness is before we can come to understand the full depth of the great thought that joy is a Christian duty. The true joy is not the kind of joy that a saying in the Old Testament compares to the 'crackling of thorns under a pot,' but something very much calmer, with no crackle in it; and very much deeper, and very much more in alliance with 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report,' than that foolish, short-lived, and empty mirth that burns down so soon into black ashes.

To be glad is a Christian duty. Many of us have as much religion as makes us sombre, and impels us often to look upon the more solemn and awful aspects of Christian truth, but we have not enough to make us glad. I do not need to dwell upon all the sources in Christian faith and belief, of that lofty and imperatively obligatory gladness, but I confine myself to the one in my text, 'Rejoicing in hope.'

Now, we all know—from the boy that is expecting to go home for his holidays in a week, up to the old man to whose eye the time-veil is wearing thin—that hope, if it is certain, is a source of gladness. How lightly one's bosom's lord sits upon its throne, when a great hope comes to animate us! how everybody is pleasant, and all things are easy, and the world looks different! Hope, if it is certain, will gladden, and if our Christianity grasps, as it ought to do, the only hope that is absolutely certain, and as sure as if it were in the past and had been experienced, then our hearts, too, will sing for joy. True joy is *not* a matter of temperament, so much as a matter of faith. It is *not* a matter of circumstances. All the surface drainage may be dry, but there is a well in the courtyard deep and cool and full and exhaustless, and a Christian who rightly understands and cherishes the Christian hope is lifted above temperament, and is not dependent upon conditions for his joys.

The Apostle, in an earlier part of this same letter, defines for us what that hope is, which thus is the secret of perpetual gladness, when he speaks about 'rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.' Yes, it is that great, supreme, calm, far off, absolutely certain prospect of being gathered into the divine glory, and walking there, like the three in the fiery furnace, unconsumed and at ease; it is that hope that will triumph over temperament, and over all occasions for melancholy, and will breathe into our life a perpetual gladness. Brethren, is it not strange and sad that with such a treasure by our sides we should consent to live such poor lives as we do?

But remember, although I cannot say to myself, 'Now I will be glad,' and cannot attain to joy by a movement of the will or direct effort, although it is of no use to say to a man—which is all that the world can ever say to him—'Cheer up and be glad,' whilst you do not alter the facts that make him sad, there is a way by which we can bring about feelings of gladness or of gloom. It is just this—we can choose what we will look at. If you prefer to occupy your mind with the troubles, losses, disappointments, hard work, blighted hopes of this poor sin-ridden world, of course sadness will come over you often, and a general grey tone will be the usual tone of your lives, as it is of the lives of many of us, broken only by occasional bursts of foolish mirth and empty laughter. But if you choose to turn away from all these, and instead of the dim, dismal, hard present, to sun yourselves in the light of the yet unrisen sun, which you can do, then, having rightly chosen the subjects to think about, the feeling will come as a matter of course. You cannot make yourselves glad by, as it were, laying hold of yourselves and lifting yourselves into gladness, but you can rule the direction of your thoughts, and so can bring around you summer in the midst of winter, by steadily contemplating the facts—and they are present facts, though we talk about them collectively as 'the future' —the facts on which all Christian gladness ought to be based. We can carry our own atmosphere with us; like the people in Italy, who in frosty weather will be seen sitting in the market-place by their stalls with a dish of embers, which they grasp in their hands, and so make themselves comfortably warm on the bitterest day. You can bring a reasonable degree of warmth into the coldest weather, if you will lay hold of the vessel in which the fire is, and keep it in your hand and close to your heart. Choose what you think about, and feelings will follow thoughts.

But it needs very distinct and continuous effort for a man to keep this great source of Christian joy clear before him. We are like the dwellers in some island of the sea, who, in some conditions of the atmosphere, can catch sight of the gleaming mountain-tops on the mainland across the stormy channel between. But thick days, with a heavy atmosphere and much mist are very frequent in our latitude, and then all the distant hills are blotted out, and we see nothing but the cold, grey sea, breaking on the cold, grey stones. Still, you can scatter the mist if you will. You can make the atmosphere bright; and it is worth an effort to bring clear before us, and to keep high above the mists that cling to the low levels, the great vision which will make us glad. Brethren, I believe that one great source of the weakness of average Christianity amongst us to-day is the dimness into which so many of us have let the hope of the glory of God pass in our hearts. So I beg you to lay to heart this first commandment, and to rejoice in hope.

II. Now, secondly, here is the thought that life, if full of joyful hope, will be patient.

I have been saying that the gladness of which my text speaks is independent of circumstances, and may persist and be continuous even when externals occasion sadness. It is possible—I do not say it is easy, God knows it is hard—I do not say it is frequently attained, but I do say it is possible—to realise that wonderful ideal of the Apostle's 'As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.' The surface of the ocean may be tossed and fretted by the winds, and churned into foam, but the great central depths 'hear not the loud winds when they call,' and are still in the midst of tempest. And we, dear brethren, ought to have an inner depth of spirit, down to the disturbance of which no surface-trouble can ever reach. That is the height of attainment of Christian faith, but it is a possible attainment for every one of us.

And if there be that burning of the light under the water, like 'Greek fire,' as it was called, which many waters could not quench—if there be that persistence of gladness beneath the surface-sorrow, as you find a running stream coming out below a glacier, then the joy and the hope, which co-exist with the sorrow, will make life patient.

Now, the Apostle means by these great words, 'patient' and 'patience,' which are often upon his lips, something more than simple endurance. That endurance is as much as many of us can often muster up strength to exercise. It sometimes takes all our faith and all our submission simply to say, 'I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it; and I will bear what thine hand lays upon me.' But that is not all that the idea of Christian 'patience' includes, for it also takes in the thought of active work, and it is *perseverance* as much as *patience*.

Now, if my heart is filled with a calm gladness because my eye is fixed upon a celestial hope, then both the passive and active sides of Christian 'patience' will be realised by me. If my hope burns bright, and occupies a large space in my thoughts, then it will not be hard to take the homely consolation of good John Newton's hymn and say—

> 'Though painful at present,
> 'Twill cease before long;
> And then, oh, how pleasant
> The conqueror's song!'

A man who is sailing to America, and knows that he will be in New York in a week, does not mind, although his cabin is contracted, and he has a great many discomforts, and though he has a bout of sea-sickness. The disagreeables are only going to last for a day or two. So our hope will make us bear trouble, and not make much of it.

And our hope will strengthen us, if it is strong, for all the work that is to be done. Persistence in the path of duty, though my heart be beating like a smith's hammer on the anvil, is what Christian men should aim at, and possess. If we have within our hearts that fire of a certain hope, it will impel us to diligence in doing the humblest duty, whether circumstances be for or against us; as some great steamer is driven right on its course, through the ocean, whatever storms may blow in the teeth of its progress, because, deep down in it, there are furnaces and boilers which supply the steam that drives the engines. So a life that is joyful because it is hopeful will be full of calm endurance and strenuous work. 'Rejoicing in hope; patient,' persevering in tribulation.

III. Lastly, our lives will be joyful, hopeful, and patient, in proportion as they are prayerful.

'Continuing instant'—which, of course, just means steadfast—'in prayer.' Paul uttered a paradox when he said, 'Rejoice in the Lord alway,' as he said long before this verse, in the very first letter that he ever wrote, or at least the first which has come down to us. There he bracketed it along with two other equally paradoxical sayings. 'Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks.' If you pray without ceasing you can rejoice without ceasing.

But can I pray without ceasing? Not if by prayer you mean only words of supplication and petition, but if by prayer you mean also a mental attitude of devotion, and a kind of sub-conscious reference to God in all that you do, such unceasing prayer is possible. Do not let us blunt the edge of this commandment, and weaken our own consciousness of having failed to obey it, by getting entangled in the cobwebs of mere curious discussions as to whether the absolute ideal of perfectly unbroken communion with God is possible in this life. At all events it is possible to us to approximate to that ideal a great deal more closely than our consciences tell us that we ever yet have done. If we are trying to keep our hearts in the midst of daily duty in contact with God, and if, ever and anon in the press of our work, we cast a thought towards Him and a prayer, then joy and hope and patience will come to us, in a degree that we do not know much about yet, but might have known all about long, long ago.

There is a verse in the Old Testament which we may well lay to heart: 'They cried unto God in the battle, and He was entreated of them.' Well, what sort of a prayer do you think that would be? Suppose that you were standing in the thick of battle with the sword of an enemy at your throat, there would not be much time for many words of prayer, would there? But the cry could go up, and the thought could go up, and as they went up, down would come the strong buckler which God puts between His servants and all evil. That is the sort of prayer that you, in the battle of business, in your shops and counting-houses and warehouses and mills, we students in our studies, and you mothers in your families and your kitchens, can send up to heaven. If thus we 'pray without ceasing,' then we shall 'rejoice evermore,' and our souls will be kept in patience and filled with the peace of God.

STILL ANOTHER TRIPLET

'Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. 14. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. 15. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.'—ROMANS xii. 13-15.

In these verses we pass from the innermost region of communion with God into the wide field of duties in relation to men. The solitary secrecies of rejoicing hope, endurance, and prayer unbroken, are exchanged for the publicities of benevolence and sympathy. In the former verses the Christian soul is in 'the secret place of the Most High'; in those of our text he comes forth with the light of God on his face, and hands laden with blessings. The juxtaposition of the two suggests the great principles to which the morality of the New Testament is ever true—that devotion to God is the basis of all practical helpfulness to man, and that practical helpfulness to man is the expression and manifestation of devotion to God.

The three sets of injunctions in our text, dissimilar though they appear, have a common basis. They are varying forms of one fundamental disposition—love; which varies in its forms according to the necessities of its objects, bringing temporal help to the needy, meeting hostility with blessing, and rendering sympathy to both the glad and the sorrowful. There is, further, a noteworthy connection, not in sense but in sound, between the first and second clauses of our text, which is lost in our English Version. 'Given to hospitality' is, as the Revised margin shows, literally, pursuing hospitality. Now the Greek, like the English word, has the special meaning of following with a hostile intent, and the use of it in the one sense suggests its other meaning to Paul, whose habit of 'going off at a word,' as it has been called, is a notable feature of his style. Hence, this second injunction, of blessing the persecutors, comes as a kind of play upon words, and is obviously occasioned by the verbal association. It would come more appropriately at a later part of the chapter, but its occurrence here is characteristic of Paul's idiosyncrasy. We may represent the connection of these two clauses by such a rendering as: Pursue hospitality, and as for those who pursue you, bless, and curse not.

We may look at these three flowers from the one root of love.

I. Love that speaks in material help.

We have here two special applications of that love which Paul regards as 'the bond of perfectness,' knitting all Christians together. The former of these two is love that expresses itself by tangible material aid. The persons to be helped are 'saints,' and it is their 'needs' that are to be aided. There is no trace in the Pauline Epistles of the community of goods which for a short time prevailed in the Church of Jerusalem and which was one of the causes that led to the need for the contribution for the poor saints in that city which occupied so much of Paul's attention at Corinth and elsewhere. But, whilst Christian love leaves the rights of property intact, it charges them with the duty of supplying the needs of the brethren. They are not absolute and unconditioned rights, but are subject to the highest principles of stewardship for God, trusteeship for men, and sacrifice for Christ. These three great thoughts condition and limit the Christian man's possession of the wealth, which, in a modified sense, it is allowable for him to call his own. His brother's need constitutes a first charge on all that belongs to him, and ought to precede the gratification of his own desires for superfluities and luxuries. If we 'see our brother have need and shut up our bowels of compassion against him' and use our possessions for the gratification of our own whims and fancies, 'how dwelleth the love of God in us?' There are few things in which Christian men of this day have more need for the vigorous exercise of conscience, and for enlightenment, than in their getting, and spending, and keeping money. In that region lies the main sphere of usefulness for many of us; and if we have not been 'faithful in that which is least,' our unfaithfulness there makes it all but impossible that we should be faithful in that which is greatest. The honest and rigid contemplation of our own faults in the administration of our worldly goods, might well invest with a terrible meaning the Lord's tremendous question, 'If ye have not been faithful in that which is another's, who shall give you that which is your own?'

The hospitality which is here enjoined is another shape which Christian love naturally took in the early days. When believers were a body of aliens, dispersed through the world, and when, as they went from one place to another, they could find homes only amongst their own brethren, the special circumstances of the time necessarily attached special importance to this duty; and as a matter of fact, we find it recognised in all the Epistles of the New Testament as one of the most imperative of Christian duties. 'It was the unity and strength which this intercourse gave that formed one of the great forces which supported Christianity.' But whilst hospitality was a special duty for the early Christians, it still remains a duty for us, and its habitual exercise would go far to break down the frowning walls which diversities of social position and of culture have reared between Christians.

II. The love that meets hostility with blessing.

There are perhaps few words in Scripture which have been more fruitful of the highest graces than this commandment. What a train of martyrs, from primitive times to the Chinese Christians in recent years, have remembered these words, and left their legacy of blessing as they laid their heads on the block or stood circled by fire at the stake! For us, in our quieter generation, actual persecution is rare, but hostility of ill-will more or less may well dog our steps, and the great principle here commended to us is that we are to meet enmity with its opposite, and to conquer by love. The diamond is cut with sharp knives, and each stroke brings out flashing beauty. There are kinds of wood which are fragrant when they burn; and there are kinds which show their veining under the plane. It is a poor thing if a Christian character only gives back like a mirror the expression of the face that looks at it. To meet hate with hate, and scorn with scorn, is not the way to turn hate into love and scorn into sympathy. Indifferent equilibrium in the presence of active antagonism is not possible for us. As long as we are sensitive we shall wince from a blow, or a sarcasm, or a sneer. We must bless in order to keep ourselves from cursing. The lesson is very hard, and the only way of obeying it fully is to keep near Christ and drink in His spirit who prayed 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'

III. Love that flows in wide sympathy.

Of the two forms of sympathy which are here enjoined, the former is the harder. To 'rejoice with them that do rejoice' makes a greater demand on unselfish love than to 'weep with them that weep.' Those who are glad feel less need of sympathy than do the sorrowful, and envy is apt to creep in and mar the completeness of sympathetic joy. But even the latter of the two injunctions is not altogether easy. The cynic has said that there is 'something not wholly displeasing in the misfortunes of our best friends';

and, though that is an utterly worldly and unchristian remark, it must be confessed not to be altogether wanting in truth.

But for obedience to both of these injunctions, a heart at leisure from itself is needed to sympathise; and not less needed is a sedulous cultivation of the power of sympathy. No doubt temperament has much to do with the degree of our obedience; but this whole context goes on the assumption that the grace of God working on temperament strengthens natural endowments by turning them into 'gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us.' Though we live in that awful individuality of ours, and are each, as it were, islanded in ourselves 'with echoing straits between us thrown,' it is possible for us, as the result of close communion with Jesus Christ, to bridge the chasms, and to enter into the joy of a brother's joy. He who groaned in Himself as He drew near to the grave of Lazarus, and was moved to weep with the weeping sisters, will help us, in the measure in which we dwell in Him and He in us, that we too may look 'not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.'

On the whole, love to Jesus is the basis of love to man, and love to man is the practical worship of Christianity. As in all things, so in the exhortations which we have now been considering, Jesus is our pattern and power. He Himself communicates with our necessities, and opens His heart to give us hospitable welcome there. He Himself has shown us how to meet and overcome hatred with love, and hurt with blessing. He shares our griefs, and by sharing lessens them. He shares our joys, and by sharing hallows them. The summing up of all these specific injunctions

is, 'Let that mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.'

STILL ANOTHER TRIPLET

'Be of the same mind one toward another. Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to things that are lowly. Be not wise in your own conceits.'—Romans xii. 16 (R.V.).

We have here again the same triple arrangement which has prevailed through a considerable portion of the context. These three exhortations are linked together by a verbal resemblance which can scarcely be preserved in translation. In the two former the same verb is employed: and in the third the word for 'wise' is cognate with the verb found in the other two clauses. If we are to seek for any closer connection of thought we may find it first in this—that all the three clauses deal with mental attitudes, whilst the preceding ones dealt with the expression of such; and second in this—that the first of the three is a general precept, and the second and third are warnings against faults which are most likely to interfere with it.

I. We note, the bond of peace.

'Be of the same mind one toward another.' It is interesting to notice how frequently the Apostle in many of his letters exhorts to mutual harmonious relations. For instance, in this very Epistle he invokes 'the God of patience and of comfort' to grant to the Roman Christians 'to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,' and to the Corinthians, who had their full share of Greek divisiveness, he writes, 'Be of the same mind, live in peace,' and assures them that, if so, 'the God of love and peace will be with them'; to his beloved Philippians he pours out his heart in beseeching them by 'the consolation that is in Christ Jesus, and the comfort of love, and the fellowship of the Spirit—' that they would 'fulfil his joy, that they be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind'; whilst to the two women in that Church who were at variance with one another he sends the earnest exhortation 'to be of the same mind in the Lord,' and prays one whom we only know by his loving designation of 'a true yokefellow,' to help them in what would apparently put a strain upon their Christian principle. For communities and for individuals the cherishing of the spirit of amity and concord is a condition without which there will be little progress in the Christian life.

But it is to be carefully noted that such a spirit may co-exist with great differences about other matters. It is not opposed to wide divergence of opinion, though in our imperfect sanctification it is hard for us to differ and yet to be in concord. We all know the hopelessness of attempting to make half a dozen good men think alike on any of the greater themes of the Christian religion; and if we could succeed in such a vain attempt, there would still be many an unguarded door through which could come the spirit of discord, and the half-dozen might have divergence of heart even whilst they profess identity of opinion. The true hindrances to our having 'the same mind one toward another' lie very much deeper in our nature than the region in which we keep our creeds. The self-regard and self-absorption, petulant dislike of fellow-Christians' peculiarities, the indifference which comes from lack of imaginative sympathy, and which ministers to the ignorance which causes it, and a thousand other weaknesses in Christian character bring about the deplorable alienation which but too plainly marks the relation of Christian communities and of individual Christians to one another in this day. When one thinks of the actual facts in every corner of Christendom, and probes one's own feelings, the contrast between the apostolic ideal and the Church's realisation of it presents a contradiction so glaring that one wonders if Christian people at all believe that it is their duty 'to be of the same mind one toward another.'

The attainment of this spirit of amity and concord ought to be a distinct object of effort, and especially in times like ours, when there is no hostile pressure driving Christian people together, but when our great social differences are free to produce a certain inevitable divergence and to check the flow of our sympathy, and when there are deep clefts of opinion, growing deeper every day, and seeming to part off Christians into camps which have little understanding of, and less sympathy with, one another. Even the strong individualism, which it is the glory of true Christian faith to foster in character, and which some forms of Christian fellowship do distinctly promote, works harm in this matter; and those who pride themselves on belonging to 'Free churches,' and standing apart from creed-bound and clergy-led communities, are specially called upon to see to it that they keep this exhortation, and cultivate 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'

It should not be necessary to insist that the closest mutual concord amongst all believers is but an imperfect manifestation, as all manifestations in life of the deepest principles must be, of the true oneness which binds together in the most sacred unity, and should bind together in closest friendship, all partakers of the one life. And assuredly the more that one life flows into our spirits, the less power will all the enemies of Christian concord have over us. It is the Christ in us which makes us kindred with all others in whom He is. It is self, in some form or other, that separates us from the possessors of like precious faith. When the tide is out, the little rock-pools on the shore lie separated by stretches of slimy weeds, but the great sea, when it rushes up, buries the divisions, and unites them all. Our Christian unity is unity in Christ, and the only sure way 'to be of the same mind one toward another' is, that 'the mind which was in Christ Jesus be in us also.'

II. The divisive power of selfish ambition.

'Set not your mind on high things, but condescend to things that are lowly.' The contrast here drawn between the high and the lowly makes it probable that the latter as well as the former is to be taken as referring to 'things' rather than persons. The margin of the Revised Version gives the literal rendering of the word translated 'condescend.' 'To be carried away with,' is metaphorically equivalent to surrendering one's self to; and the two clauses present two sides of one disposition, which seeks not for personal advancement or conspicuous work which may minister to self-gratulation, but contentedly fills the lowly sphere, and 'the humblest duties on herself doth lay.' We need not pause to point out that such an ideal is dead against the fashionable maxims of this generation. Personal ambition is glorified as an element in progress, and to a world which believes in such a proverb as 'devil take the hindmost,' these two exhortations can only seem fanatical absurdity. And yet, perhaps, if we fairly take into account how the seeking after personal advancement and conspicuous work festers the soul, and how the flower of heart's-ease grows, as Bunyan's shepherd-boy found out, in the lowly valley, these exhortations to a quiet performance of lowly duties and a contented filling of lowly spheres, may seem touched with a higher wisdom than is to be found in the arenas where men trample over each other in their pursuit of a fame 'which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.' What a peaceful world it would be, and what peaceful souls they would have, if Christian people really adopted as their own these two simple maxims. They are easy to understand, but how hard they are to follow.

It needs scarcely be noted that the temper condemned here destroys all the concord and amity which the Apostle has been urging in the previous clause. Where every man is eagerly seeking to force himself in front of his neighbour, any community will become a struggling mob; and they who are trying to outrun one another and who grasp at 'high things,' will never be 'of the same mind one toward another.' But, we may observe that the surest way to keep in check the natural selfish tendency to desire conspicuous things for ourselves is honestly, and with rigid self-control, to let ourselves be carried away by enthusiasm for humble tasks. If we would not disturb our lives and fret our hearts by ambitions that, even when gratified, bring no satisfaction, we must yield ourselves to the impulse of the continuous stream of lowly duties which runs through every life.

But, plainly as this exhortation is needful. it is too heavy a strain to be ever carried out except by the power of Christ formed in the heart. It is in His earthly life that we find the great example of the highest stooping to the lowest duties, and elevating them by taking them upon Himself. He did not 'strive nor cry, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets.' Thirty years of that perfect life were spent in a little village folded away in the Galilean hills, with rude peasants for the only spectators, and the narrow sphere of a carpenter's shop for its theatre. For the rest, the publicity possible would have been obscurity to an ambitious soul. To speak comforting words to a few weeping hearts; to lay His hands on a few sick folk and heal them; to go about in a despised land doing good, loved indeed by outcasts and sinners, unknown by all the dispensers of renown, and consciously despised by all whom the world honoured—that was the perfect life of the Incarnate God. And that is an example which His followers seem with one consent to set aside in their eager race after distinction and work that may glorify their names. The difficulty of a faithful following of these precepts, and the only means by which that difficulty can be overcome, are touchingly taught us in another of Paul's Epistles by the accumulation of motives which he brings to bear upon his commandment, when he exhorts by the tender motives of 'comfort in Christ, consolation of love, fellowship of the Spirit, and tender mercies and compassions, that ye fulfil my joy, being of the same mind, of one accord; doing nothing through faction or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself.' As the pattern for each of us in our narrow sphere, he holds forth the mind that was in Christ Jesus, and the great self-emptying which he shrank not from, 'but being in the form of God counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death.'

III. The divisive power of intellectual self-conceit.

In this final clause the Apostle, in some sense, repeats the maxim with which he began the series of special exhortations in this chapter. He there enjoined 'every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think'; here he deals with one especial form of such too lofty thinking, viz. intellectual conceit. He is possibly quoting the Book of Proverbs (iii. 7), where we read, 'Be not wise in thine own eyes,' which is preceded by, 'Lean not to thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge Him'; and is followed by, 'Fear the Lord and depart from evil'; thus pointing to the acknowledgment and fear of the Lord as the great antagonist of such over-estimate of one's own wisdom as of all other faults of mind and life. It needs not to point out how such a disposition breaks Christian unity of spirit. There is something especially isolating in that form of self-conceit. There are few greater curses in the Church than little coteries of superior persons who cannot feed on ordinary food, whose enlightened intelligence makes them too fastidious to soil their dainty fingers with rough, vulgar work, and whose supercilious criticism of the unenlightened souls that are content to condescend to lowly Christian duties, is like an iceberg that brings down the temperature wherever it floats. That temper indulged in, breaks the unity, reduces to inactivity the work, and puts an end to the progress, of any Christian community in which it is found; and just as its predominance is harmful, so the obedience to the exhortation against it is inseparable from the fulfilling of its sister precepts. To know ourselves for the foolish creatures that we are, is a mighty help to being 'of the same mind one toward another.' Who thinks of himself soberly and according to the measure of faith which God hath dealt to him will not hunger after high things, but rather prefer the lowly ones that are on a level with his lowly self.

The exhortations of our text were preceded with injunctions to distribute material help, and to bestow helpful sympathy. The tempers enjoined in our present text are the inward source and fountain of such external bestowments. The rendering of material help and of sympathetic emotion are right and valuable only as they are the outcome of this unanimity and lowliness. It is possible to 'distribute to the necessity of saints' in such a way as that the gift pains more than a blow; it is possible to proffer sympathy so that the sensitive heart shrinks from it. It was 'when the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul' that it became natural to have all things common. As in the aurora borealis, quivering beams from different centres stream out and at each throb approach each other till they touch and make an arch of light that glorifies the winter's night, so, if Christian men were 'of the same mind toward one another,' did not 'set their minds on high things, but condescended to things that were lowly, and were not wise in their own conceits,' the Church of Christ would shine forth in the darkness of a selfish world and would witness to Him who came down 'from the highest throne in glory' to the lowliest place in this lowly world, that He might lift us to His own height of glory everlasting.

STILL ANOTHER TRIPLET

'Render to no man evil for evil. Take thought for things honourable in the sight of all men. 18. If it be possible, as much as in you lieth, be at peace with all men.'—ROMANS xii. 17, 18 (R.V.).

THE closing words of this chapter have a certain unity in that they deal principally with a Christian's duty in the face of hostility and antagonism. A previous injunction touched on the same subject in the exhortation to bless the persecutors; but with that exception, all the preceding verses have dealt with duties owing to those with whom we stand in friendly relations. Such exhortations take no cognisance of the special circumstances of the primitive Christians as 'lambs in the midst of wolves'; and a large tract of Christian duty would be undealt with, if we had not such directions for feelings and actions in the face of hate and hurt. The general precept in our text is expanded in a more complete form in the verses which follow the text, and we may postpone its consideration until we have to deal with them. It is one form of the application of the 'love without hypocrisy' which has been previously recommended. The second of these three precepts seems quite heterogeneous, but it may be noticed that the word for 'evil' in the former and that for 'honourable,' in these closely resemble each other in sound, and the connection of the two clauses may be partially owing to that verbal resemblance; whilst we may also discern a real link between the thoughts in the consideration that we owe even to our enemies the exhibition of a life which a prejudiced hostility will be forced to recognise as good. The third of these exhortations prescribes unmoved persistence in friendly regard to all men.

Dealing then, in this sermon only, with the second and third of these precepts, and postponing the consideration of the first to the following discourse, we have here the counsel that

I. Hostility is to be met with a holy and beautiful life.

The Authorised Version inadequately translates the significant word in this exhortation by 'honest.' The Apostle is not simply enjoining honesty in our modern, narrow sense of the word, which limits it to the rendering to every man his own. It is a remarkable thing that 'honest,' like many other words expressing various types of goodness, has steadily narrowed in signification, and it is very characteristic of England that probity as to money and material goods should be its main meaning. Here the word is used in the full breadth of its ancient use, and is equivalent to that which is fair with the moral beauty of goodness.

A Christian man then is bound to live a life which all men will acknowledge to be good. In that precept is implied the recognition of even bad men's notions of morality as correct. The Gospel is not a new system of ethics, though in some points it brings old virtues into new prominence, and alters their perspective. It is further implied that the world's standard of what Christians ought to be may be roughly taken as a true one. Christian men would learn a great deal about themselves, and might in many respects heighten their ideal, if they would try to satisfy the expectations of the most degraded among them as to what they ought to be. The worst of men has a rude sense of duty which tops the attainments of the best. Christian people ought to seek for the good opinion of those around them. They are not to take that opinion as the motive for their conduct, nor should they do good in order to be praised or admired for it; but they are to 'adorn the doctrine,' and to let their light shine that men seeing their good may be led to think more loftily of its source, and so to 'glorify their Father which is in heaven.' That is one way of preaching the Gospel. The world knows goodness when it sees it, though it often hates it, and has no better ground for its dislike of a man than that his purity and beauty of character make the lives of others seem base indeed. Bats feel the light to be light, though they flap against it, and the winnowing of their leathery wings and their blundering flight are witnesses to that against which they strike. Jesus had to say, 'The world hateth Me because I testify of it that the deeds thereof are evil.' That witness was the result of His being 'the Light of the world'; and if His followers are illuminated from Him, they will have the same effect, and must be prepared for the same response. But none the less is it incumbent upon them to 'take thought for things honourable in the sight of all men.'

This duty involves the others of taking care that we have goodness to show, and that we do not make our goodness repulsive by our additions to it. There are good people who comfort themselves when men dislike them, or scoff at them, by thinking that their religion is the cause, when it is only their own roughness and harshness of character. It is not enough that we present an austere and repellent virtue; the fair food should be set on a fair platter. This duty is especially owing to our enemies. They are our keenest critics. They watch for our halting. The thought of their hostile scrutiny should ever stimulate us, and the consciousness that Argus-eyes are watching us, with a keenness sharpened by dislike, should lead us not only to vigilance over our own steps, but also to the prayer, 'Lead me in a plain path, because of those who watch me.' To 'provide things honest in the sight of all men' is a possible way of disarming some hostility, conciliating some prejudice, and commending to some hearts the Lord whom we seek to imitate.

II. Be sure that, if there is to be enmity, it is all on one side.

'As much as in you lieth, be at peace with all.'

These words are, I think, unduly limited when they are supposed to imply that there are circumstances in which a Christian has a right to be at strife. As if they meant: Be peaceable as far as you can; but if it be impossible, then quarrel. The real meaning goes far deeper than that. 'It takes two to make a quarrel,' says the old proverb; it takes two to make peace also, does it not? We cannot determine whether our relations with men will be peaceful or no; we are only answerable for our part, and for that we are answerable. 'As much as lieth in you' is the explanation of 'if it be possible.' Your part is to be at peace; it is not your part up to a certain point and no further, but always, and in all circumstances, it is your part. It may not be possible to be at peace with all men; there may be some who *will* quarrel with you. You are not to blame for that, but their part and yours are separate, and your part is the same whatever they do. Be you at peace with all men whether they are at peace with you or not. Don't you quarrel with them even if they will quarrel with you. That seems to me to be plainly the meaning of the words. It would be contrary to the tenor of the context and the teaching of the New Testament to suppose that here we had that favourite principle, 'There is a point beyond which forbearance cannot go,' where it becomes right to cherish hostile sentiments or to try to injure a man. If there be such a point, it is very remarkable that there is no attempt made in the New Testament to define it. The nearest approach to such definition is 'till seventy times seven,' the two perfect numbers multiplied into themselves. So I think that this injunction absolutely prescribes persistent, patient peacefulness, and absolutely proscribes our taking up the position of antagonism, and under no circumstances meeting hate with hate. It does not follow that there is never to be opposition. It may be necessary for the good of the opponent himself, and for the good of society, that he should be hindered in his actions of hostility, but there is never to be bitterness; and we must take care that none of the devil's leaven mingles with our zeal against evil.

There is no need for enlarging on the enormous difficulty of carrying out such a commandment in our daily lives. We all know too well how hard it is; but we may reflect for a moment on the absolute necessity of obeying this precept to the full. For their own souls' sakes Christian men are to avoid all bitterness, strife, and malice. Let us try to remember, and to bring to bear on our daily lives, the solemn things which Jesus said about God's forgiveness being measured by our forgiveness. The faithful, even though imperfect, following of this exhortation would revolutionise our lives. Nothing that we can only win by fighting with our fellows is worth fighting for. Men will weary of antagonism which is met only by the imperturbable calm of a heart at peace with God, and seeking peace with all men. The hot fire of hatred dies down, like burning coals scattered on a glacier, when laid against the crystal coldness of a patient, peaceful spirit. Watch-dogs in farmhouses will bark half the night through because they hear another barking a mile off. It takes two to make a quarrel; let me be sure that I am never one of the two!

STILL ANOTHER TRIPLET

'Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. 20. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. 21. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.'—ROMANS xii. 19-21.

THE natural instinct is to answer enmity with enmity, and kindliness with kindliness. There are many people of whom we think well and like, for no other reason than because we believe that they think well of and like us. Such a love is really selfishness. In the same fashion, dislike, and alienation on the part of another naturally reproduce themselves in our own minds. A dog will stretch its neck to be patted, and snap at a stick raised to strike it. It requires a strong effort to master this instinctive tendency, and that effort the plainest principles of Christian morality require from us all. The precepts in our text are in twofold form, negative and positive; and they are closed with a general principle, which includes both these forms, and much more besides. There are two pillars, and a great lintel coping them, like the trilithons of Stonehenge.

I. We deal with the negative precept.

'Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto wrath.' Do not take the law into your own hands, but leave God's way of retribution to work itself out. By avenging, the Apostle means a passionate redress of private wrongs at the bidding of personal resentment. We must note how deep this precept goes. It prohibits not merely external acts which, in civilised times are restrained by law, but, as with Christian morality, it deals with thoughts and feelings, and not only with deeds. It forbids such natural and common thoughts as 'I owe him an ill turn for that'; 'I should like to pay him off.' A great deal of what is popularly called 'a proper spirit' becomes extremely improper if tested by this precept. There is an eloquent word in German which we can only clumsily reproduce, which christens the ugly pleasure at seeing misfortune and calls it 'joy in others' disasters.' We have not the word; would that we had not the thing!

A solemn reason is added for the difficult precept, in that frequently misunderstood saying, 'Give place unto wrath.' The question is, Whose wrath? And, plainly, the subsequent words of the section show that it is God's. That quotation comes from Deuteronomy xxxii. 35. It is possibly unfortunate that 'vengeance' is ascribed to God; for hasty readers lay hold of the idea of passionate resentment, and transfer it to Him, whereas His retributive action has in it no resentment and no passion. Nor are we to suppose that the thought here is only the base one, *they are sure to be punished, so we need not trouble.* The Apostle points to the solemn fact of retribution as an element in the Divine government. It is not merely automatically working laws which recompense evil by evil, but it is the face of the Lord which is inexorably and inevitably set 'against them that do evil.' That recompense is not hidden away in the future behind the curtain of death, but is realised in the present, as every evil-doer too surely and bitterly experiences.

'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' God only has the right to recompense the ungodly and the sinner as well as the righteous. Dwelling in such a system as we do, how dares any one take that work into his hands? It requires perfect knowledge of the true evil of an action, which no one has who cannot read the heart; it requires perfect freedom from passion; it requires perfect immunity from evil desert on the part of the avenger; in a word, it belongs to God, and to Him alone. We have nothing to do with apportioning retribution to desert, either in private actions or in the treatment of so-called criminals. In the latter our objects should be reformation and the safety of society. If we add to these retribution, we transcend our functions.

II. Take the positive,—Follow God's way of meeting hostility with beneficence.

The hungry enemy is to be fed, the thirsty to be given drink; and the reason is, that such beneficence will 'heap coals of fire upon his head.' The negative is not enough. To abstain from vengeance will leave the heart unaffected, and may simply issue in the cessation of all intercourse. The reason assigned sounds at first strange. It is clear that the 'coals of fire' which are to be heaped on the head are meant to melt and soften the heart, and cause it to glow with love. There may be also included the burning pangs of shame felt by a man whose evil is answered by good. But these are secondary and auxiliary to the true end of kindling the fire of love in his alienated heart. The great object which every Christian man is bound to have in view is to win over the enemy and melt away misconceptions and hostility. It is not from any selfish regard to one's own personal ease that we are so to act, but because of the sacred regard which Christ has taught us to cherish for the blessing of peace amongst men, and in order that we may deliver a brother from the snare, and make him share in the joys of fellowship with God. The only way to burn up the evil in his heart is by heaping coals of kindness and beneficence on his head. And for such an end it becomes us to watch for opportunities. We have to mark the right moment, and make sure that we time our offer for food when he is hungry and of drink when he thirsts; for often *mal-a-propos* offers of kindness make things worse. Such is God's way. His thunderbolts we cannot grasp, His love we can copy. Of the two weapons mercy and judgment which He holds in His hand, the latter is emphatically His own; the former should be ours too.

III. In all life meet and conquer evil with good.

This last precept, 'Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good,' is cast into a form which covers not only relations to enemies, but all contact with evil of every kind. It involves many great thoughts which can here be only touched. It implies that in all our lives we have to fight evil, and that it conquers, and we are beaten when we are led to do it. It is only conquered by being transformed into good. We overcome our foes when we win them to be lovers. We overcome our temptations to doing wrong when we make them occasions for developing virtues; we overcome the evil of sorrow when we use it to bring us nearer to God; we overcome the men around us when we are not seduced by their example to evil, but attract them to goodness by ours.

Evil is only thus transformed by the positive exercise of goodness on our part. We have seen this in regard to enemies in the preceding remarks. In regard to other forms of evil, it is often better not to fight them directly, but to occupy the mind and heart with positive truth and goodness, and the will and hands with active service. A rusty knife will not be cleaned so effectually by much scouring as by strenuous use. Our lives are to be moulded after the great example of Him, who at almost the last moment of His earthly course said, 'Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world.' Jesus seeks to conquer evil in us all, and counts that He has conquered it when He has changed it into love.

LOVE AND THE DAY

'Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. 9. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 10. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. 11. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. 12. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. 13. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying: 14. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' —ROMANS xiii. 8-14.

THE two paragraphs of this passage are but slightly connected. The first inculcates the obligation of universal love; and the second begins by suggesting, as a motive for the discharge of that duty, the near approach of 'the day.' The light of that dawn draws Paul's eyes and leads him to wider exhortations on Christian purity as befitting the children of light.

I. Verses 8-10 set forth the obligation of a love which embraces all men, and comprehends all duties to them The Apostle has just been laying down the general exhortation, 'Pay every man his due,' and applying it especially to the Christian's relation to civic rulers. He repeats it in a negative form, and bases on it the obligation of loving every man. That love is further represented as the sum and substance of the law. Thus Paul brings together two thoughts which are often dealt with as mutually exclusive,—namely, love and law. He does not talk sentimentalisms about the beauty of charity and the like, but lays it down, as a 'hard and fast rule,' that we are bound to love every man with whom we come in contact; or, as the Greek has it, 'the other.'

That is the first plain truth taught here. Love is not an emotion which we may indulge or not, as we please. It is not to select its objects according to our estimate of their lovableness or goodness. But we are bound to love, and that all round, without distinction of beautiful or ugly, good or bad. 'A hard saying; who can hear it?' Every man is our creditor for that debt. He does not get his due from us unless he gets love. Note, further, that the debt of love is never discharged. After all payments it still remains owing. There is no paying in full of all demands, and, as Bengel says, it is an undying debt. We are apt to weary of expending love, especially on unworthy recipients, and to think that we have wiped off all claims, and it may often be true that our obligations to others compel us to cease helping one: but if we laid Paul's words to heart, our patience would be longer-breathed, and we should not be so soon ready to shut hearts and purses against even unthankful suitors.

Further, Paul here teaches us that this debt (*debitum*, 'duty') of love includes all duties. It is the fulfilling of the law, inasmuch as it will secure the conduct which the law prescribes. The Mosaic law itself indicates this, since it recapitulates the various commandments of the second table, in the one precept of love to our neighbour (Lev. xix. 18). Law enjoins but has no power to get its injunctions executed. Love enables and inclines to do all that law prescribes, and to avoid all that it prohibits. The multiplicity of duties is melted into unity; and that unity, when it comes into act, unfolds into whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. Love is the mother tincture which, variously diluted and manipulated, yields all potent and fragrant draughts. It is the white light which the prism of daily life resolves into its component colours.

But Paul seems to limit the action of love here to negative doing no ill. That is simply because the commandments are mostly negative, and that they are is a sad token of the lovelessness natural to us all. But do we love ourselves only negatively, or are we satisfied with doing ourselves no harm? That stringent pattern of love to others not only prescribes degree, but manner. It teaches that true love to men is not weak indulgence, but must sometimes chastise, and thwart, and always must seek their good, and not merely their gratification.

Whoever will honestly seek to apply that negative precept of working no ill to others, will find it positive enough. We harm men when we fail to help them.

If we can do them a kindness, and do it not, we do them ill. Non-activity for good is activity for evil. Surely, nothing can be plainer than the bearing of this teaching on the Christian duty as to intoxicants. If by using these a Christian puts a stumbling-block in the way of a weak will, then he is working ill to his neighbour, and that argues absence of love, and that is dishonest, shirking payment of a plain debt.

II. The great stimulus to love and to all purity is set forth as being the near approach of the day (verses 11-14). 'The day,' in Paul's writing, has usually the sense of the great day of the Lord's return, and may have that meaning here; for, as Jesus has told us, 'it is not for' even inspired Apostles 'to know the times or the seasons,' and it is no dishonour to apostolic inspiration to assign to it the limits which the Lord has assigned.

But, whether we take this as the meaning of the phrase, or regard it simply as pointing to the time of death as the dawning of heaven's day, the weight of the motive is unaffected. The language is vividly picturesque. The darkness is thinning, and the blackness turning grey. Light begins to stir and whisper. A band of soldiers lies asleep, and, as the twilight begins to dawn, the bugle call summons them to awake, to throw off their night-gear,—namely, the works congenial to darkness,—and to brace on their armour of light. Light may here be regarded as the material of which the glistering armour is made; but, more probably, the expression means weapons appropriate to the light.

Such being the general picture, we note the fact which underlies the whole representation; namely, that every life is a definite whole which has a fixed end. Jesus said, 'We must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day: the night cometh.' Paul uses the opposite metaphors in these verses. But, though the two sayings are opposite in form, they are identical in substance. In both, the predominant thought is that of the rapidly diminishing space of earthly life, and the complete unlikeness to it of the future. We stand like men on a sandbank with an incoming tide, and every wash of the waves eats away its edges, and presently it will yield below our feet. We forget this for the most part, and perhaps it is not well that it should be ever present; but that it should never be present is madness and sore loss.

Paul, in his intense moral earnestness, in verse 13, bids us regard ourselves as already in 'the day,' and shape our conduct as if it shone around us and all things were made manifest by its light. The sins to be put off are very gross and palpable. They are for the most part sins of flesh, such as even these Roman Christians had to be warned against, and such as need to be manifested by the light even now among many professing Christian communities.

But Paul has one more word to say. If he stopped without it, he would have said little to help men who are crying out, 'How am I to strip off this clinging evil, which seems my skin rather than my clothing? How am I to put on that flashing panoply?' There is but one way,—put on the Lord Jesus Christ. If we commit ourselves to Him by faith, and front our temptations in His strength, and thus, as it were, wrap ourselves in Him, He will be to us dress and armour, strength and righteousness. Our old self will fall away, and we shall take no forethought for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

SALVATION NEARER

'. . . Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.'—ROMANS xiii. 11.

THERE is no doubt, I suppose, that the Apostle, in common with the whole of the early Church, entertained more or less consistently the expectation of living to witness the second coming of Jesus Christ. There are in Paul's letters passages which look both in the direction of that anticipation, and in the other one of expecting to taste death. 'We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord,' he says twice in one chapter. 'I am ready to be offered, and the hour of my departure is at hand,' he says in his last letter.

Now this contrariety of anticipation is but the natural result of what our Lord Himself said, 'It is not for you to know the times and the seasons,' and no one, who is content to form his doctrine of the knowledge resulting from inspiration from the words of Jesus Christ Himself, need stumble in the least degree in recognising the plain fact that Paul and his brother Apostles did not know when the Master was to come. Christ Himself had told them that there was a chamber locked against their entrance, and therefore we do not need to think that it militates against the authoritative inspiration of these early teachers of the Church, if they, too, searched 'what manner of time the Spirit which was in them did signify when it testified beforehand . . . the glory that should follow.'

Now, my text is evidently the result of the former of these two anticipations, viz. that Paul and his generation were probably to see the coming of the Lord from heaven. And to him the thought that 'the night was far spent,' as the context says, 'and the day was at hand,' underlay his most buoyant hope, and was the inspiration and motive-spring of his most strenuous effort.

Now, our relation to the closing moments of our own earthly lives, to the fact of death, is precisely the same as that of the Apostle and his brethren to the coming of the Lord. We, too, stand in that position of partial ignorance, and for us practically the words of my text, and all their parallel words, point to how we should think of, and how we should be affected by, the end to which we are coming. And this is the grand characteristic of the Christian view of that last solemn moment. 'Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.' So I would note, first of all, what these words teach us should be the Christian view of our own end; and, second, to what conduct that view should lead us.

I. The Christian view of death.

'Now is our salvation nearer.' We have to think away by faith and hope all the grim externals of death, and to get to the heart of the thing. And then everything that is repulsive, everything that makes flesh and blood shrink, disappears and is evaporated, and beneath the folds of his black garment, there is revealed God's last, sweetest, most triumphant angel-messenger to Christian souls, the great, strong, silent Angel of Death, and he carries in his hand the gift of a full salvation. That is what our Apostle rose to the rapture of beholding, when he knew that the thought of his surviving till Christ came again must be put away, and when close to the last moment of his life, he said, 'The Lord shall deliver me, and save me into His everlasting kingdom.' What was the deliverance and being saved that he expected and expresses in these words? Immunity from punishment? Escape from the headsman's axe? Being 'delivered from the mouth of the lion,' the persecuting fangs of the bloody Nero? By no means. He knew that death was at hand, and he said, 'He will save me'—not from it, but through it—'into His everlasting kingdom.' And so in the words of my text we may say—though Paul did not mean them so—as we see the distance between us, and that certain close, dwindling, dwindling, dwindling: 'Now,' as moment after moment ticks itself into the past, 'now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.' Children, when they are getting near their holidays, take strips of paper, and tear off a piece as each day passes. And as we tear off the days let us feel that we are drawing closer to our home, and that the blessedness laid up for us in it is drawing nearer to us. 'Our salvation,' not our destruction, our fuller life, not in any true sense of the word our 'death,' is 'nearer than when we believed.'

But some one may say, 'Is a man not saved till after he is dead?' Is salvation future, not coming till after the grave? No, certainly not. There are three aspects of that word in Scripture. Sometimes the New Testament writers treat salvation as past, and represent a Christian as being invested with the possession of it all at the very moment of his first faith. That is true, that whatever is yet to be evolved from what is given to the poorest and foulest sinner, in the moment of his initial faith in Christ, there is nothing to be added to it. The salvation which the penitent thief received on the cross is all the salvation that he was ever to get. But out of it there came welling and welling and welling, when he had passed into the region 'where beyond these voices there is peace'—there came welling out from that inexhaustible fountain which was opened in him all the fullnesses of an eternal progress in the heavens. And so it is with us. Salvation is a past gift which we received when we believed.

But in another aspect, which is also emphatically stated in Scripture, it is a progressive process, and not merely a gift bestowed once for all in the past. I do not dwell upon that thought, but just remind you of a turn of expression which occurs in various connections more than once. 'The Lord added to the Church daily such as were being saved,' says Luke. Still more emphatically in the Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle puts into antithesis the two progressive processes, and speaks of the Gospel as being preached, and being a savour of life unto life 'to them that are being saved,' and a savour of destruction 'to them that are being lost.' No moral or spiritual condition is stereotyped or stagnant. It is all progressive. And so the salvation that is given once for all is ever being unfolded, and the Christian life on earth is the unfolding of it.

But in another aspect still, such as is presented in my text, and in other parallel passages, that salvation is regarded as lying on the other side of the flood, because the manifestations of it there, the evolving there of what is in it, and the great gifts that come then, are so transcendently above all even of our selectest experiences here, that they are, as it were, new, though still their roots are in the old. The salvation which culminates in the absolute removal from our whole being of all manner of evil, whether it be sorrow or sin, and in the conclusive bestowal upon us of all manner of good, whether it be righteousness or joy, and which has for its seal 'the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body,' so that body, soul, and spirit 'make one music as before, but vaster,' is so far beyond the germs of itself which here we experience that my text and its like are amply vindicated. And the man who is most fully persuaded and conscious that he possesses the salvation of God, and most fully and blessedly aware that that salvation is gradually gaining power in his life, is the very man who will most feel that between its highest manifestation on earth, and its lowest in the heavens there is such a gulf as that the wine that he will drink there at the Father's table is indeed new wine. And so 'is our salvation nearer,' though we already possess it, 'than when we believed.'

Dear brethren, if these things be true, and if to die is to be saved into the kingdom, do not two thoughts result? The one is that that blessed consummation should occupy more of our thoughts than I am afraid it does. As life goes on, and the space dwindles between us and it, we older people naturally fall into the way, unless we are fools, of more seriously and frequently turning our thoughts to the end. I suppose the last week of a voyage to Australia has far more thoughts in it about the landing next week than the two or three first days of beating down the English Channel had. I do not want to put old heads on young shoulders in this or in any other respect. But sure I am that it does belong very intimately to the strength of our Christian characters that we should, as the Psalmist says, be 'wise' to 'consider our latter end.'

The other thought that follows is as plain, viz. that that anticipation should always be buoyant, hopeful, joyous. We have nothing to do with the sad aspects of parting from earth. They are all but non-existent for the Christian consciousness, when it is as vigorous and God-directed as it ought to be. They drop into the background, and sometimes are lost to sight altogether. Remember how this Apostle, when he does think about death, looks at it with—I was going to quote words which may strike you as being inappropriate—'a frolic welcome'; how, at all events, he is neither a bit afraid of it, nor does he see in it anything from which to shrink. He speaks of being with Christ, which is far better; 'absent from the body, present with the Lord'; 'the dissolution of the earthly house of this tabernacle'—the tumbling down of the old clay cottage in order that a stately palace of marble and precious stones may be reared upon its site; 'the hour of my departure is at hand; I have finished the fight.' Peter, too, chimes in with his words: 'My exodus; my departure,' and both of the two are looking, if not longingly, at all events without a tremor of the eyelid, into the very eyeballs of the messenger whom most men feel so hideous. Is it not a wonderful gift to Christian souls that by faith in Jesus Christ, the realm in which their hope can expatiate is more than doubled, and annexes the dim lands beyond the frontier of death? Dear friends, if we are living in Christ, the thought of the end and that here we are absent from home, ought to be infinitely sweet, of whatever superficial terrors this poor, shrinking flesh may still be conscious. And I am sure that the nearer we get to our Saviour, and the more we realise the joyous possession of salvation as already ours, and the more we are conscious of the expanding of that gift in our hearts, the more we shall be delivered from that fear of death which makes men all their 'lifetime subject to bondage.' So I beseech you to aim at this, that, when you look forward, the furthest thing you see on the horizon of earth may be that great

Angel of Death coming to save you into the everlasting kingdom.

Now, just a word about

II. The conduct to which such a hope should incite.

The Apostle puts it very plainly in the context, and we need but expand in a word or two what he teaches us there. 'And that knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.' To what does he refer by 'that'? The whole of the practical exhortations to a Christian life which have been given before. Everything that is duty becomes tenfold more stringent and imperative when we apprehend the true meaning of that last moment. They tell us that it is unwholesome to be thinking about death and the beyond, because to do so takes away interest from much of our present occupations and weakens energy. If there is anything from which a man is wrenched away because he steadily contemplates the fact of being wrenched away altogether from everything before long, it is something that he had better be wrenched from. And if there be any occupations which dwindle into nothingness, and into which a man cannot for the life of him fling himself with any thoroughgoing enthusiasm or interest, if once the thought of death stirs in him, depend upon it they are occupations which are in themselves contemptible and unworthy. All good aims will gain greater power over us; we shall have a saner estimate of what is worth living for; we shall have a new standard of what is the relative importance of things; and if some that looked very great turn out to be very small when we let that searching light in upon them, and others which seemed very insignificant spring suddenly up into dominating magnitude—that new and truer perspective will be all clea gain. The more we feel that our salvation is sweeping towards us, as it were, from the throne of God through the blue abysses, the more diligently we shall 'work while it is called day,' and the more earnestly we shall seek, when the Saviour and His salvation come, to be found with loins girt for all strenuous work, and lamps burning in all the brightness of the light of a Christian character.

Further, says Paul, this hopeful, cheerful contemplation of approaching salvation should lead us to cast off the evil, and to put on the good. You will remember the heart-stirring imagery which the Apostle employs in the context, where he says, 'The day is at hand; let us therefore fling off the works of darkness'—as men in the morning, when the daylight comes through the window, and makes them lift their eyelids, fling off their night-gear—'and let us put on the armour of light.' We are soldiers, and must be clad in what will be bullet-proof, and will turn a sword's edge. And where shall steel of celestial temper be found that can resist the fiery darts shot at the Christian soldier? His armour must be 'of light.' Clad in the radiance of Christian character he will be invulnerable. And how can we, who have robed ourselves in the works of darkness, either cast them off or array ourselves in sparkling armour of light? Paul tells us, 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh.' The picture is of a camp of sleeping soldiers; the night wears thin, the streaks of saffron are coming in the dawning east. One after another the sleepers awake; they cast aside their night-gear, and they brace on the armour that sparkles in the beams of the morning sun. So they are ready when the trumpet sounds the reveille, and with the morning comes the Captain of the Lord's host, and with the Captain comes the perfecting of the salvation which is drawing nearer and nearer to us, as our moments glide through our fingers like the beads of a rosary. Many men think of death and fear; the Christian should think of death—and hope.

THE SOLDIER'S MORNING-CALL

'Let us put on the armour of light.'—ROMANS xiii. 12.

IT is interesting to notice that the metaphor of the Christian armour occurs in Paul's letters throughout his whole course. It first appears, in a very rudimentary form, in the earliest of the Epistles, that to the Thessalonians. It appears here in a letter which belongs to the middle of his career, and it appears finally in the Epistle to the Ephesians, in its fully developed and drawn-out shape, at almost the end of his work. So we may fairly suppose that it was one of his familiar thoughts. Here it has a very picturesque addition, for the picture that is floating before his vivid imagination is that of a company of soldiers, roused by the morning bugle, casting off their night-gear because the day is beginning to dawn, and bracing on the armour that sparkles in the light of the rising sun. 'That,' says Paul, 'is what you Christian people ought to be. Can you not hear the notes of the reveille? The night is far spent; the day is at hand; therefore let us put off the works of darkness—the night-gear that was fit for those hours of slumber. Toss it away, and put on the armour that belongs to the day.'

Now, I am not going to ask or try to answer th question of how far this Apostolic exhortation is based upon the Apostle's expectation that the world was drawing near its end. That does not matter at all for us at present, for the fact which he expresses as the foundation of this exhortation is true about us all, and about our position in the midst of these fleeting shadows round us. We are hastening to the dawning of the true day. And so let me try to emphasise the exhortation here, old and threadbare and commonplace as it is, because we all need it, at whatever point of life's journey we have arrived.

Now, the first thing that strikes me is that the garb for the man expectant of the day is armour.

We might have anticipated something very different in accordance with the thoughts that Paul's imagery here suggests, about the difference between the night which is so swiftly passing, and is full of enemies and dangers, and the day which is going to dawn, and is full of light and peace and joy. We might have expected that he would have said, 'Let us put on the festal robes.' But no! 'The night is far spent; the day is at hand.' But the dress that befits the expectant of the day is not yet the robe of the feast, but it is 'the armour' which, put into plain words, means just this, that there is fighting, always fighting, to be done. If you are ever to belong to the day, you have to equip yourselves *now* with armour and weapons. I do not need to dwell upon that, but I do wish to insist upon this fact, that after all that may be truly said about growth in grace, and the peaceful approximation towards perfection in the Christian character, we cannot dispense with the other element in progress, and that is fighting. We have to struggle for every step. *Growth* is not enough to define completely the process by which men become conformed to the image of the Father, and are 'made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.' Growth does express part of it, but only a part. Conflict is needed to come in, before you have the whole aspect of Christian progress before your minds. For there will always be antagonism without and traitors within. There will always be recalcitrant horses that need to be whipped up, and jibbing horses that need to be dragged forward, and shying ones that need to be violently coerced and kept in the traces. Conflict is the law, because of the enemies, and because of the conspiracy between the weakness within and the things without that appeal to it.

We hear a great deal to-day about being 'sanctified by faith.' I believe that as much as any man, but the office of faith is to bring us the power that cleanses, and the application of that power requires our work, and it requires our fighting. So it is not enough to say, 'Trust for your sanctifying as you have trusted for your justifying and acceptance,' but you have to work out what you get by your faith, and you will never work it out unless you fight against your unworthy self, and the temptations of the world. The garb of the candidate for the day is armour.

And there is another side to that same thought, and that is, the more vivid our expectations of that blessed dawn the more complete should be our bracing on of the armour. The anticipation of that future, in very many instances, in the Christian Church, has led to precisely the opposite state of mind. It has induced people to drop into mere fantastic sentiment, or to ignore this contemptible present, and think that they have nothing to do with it, and are only 'waiting for the coming of the Lord,' and the like. Paul says, 'Just because, on your eastern horizon, you can see the pink flush that tells that the night is gone, and the day is coming, therefore do not be a sentimentalist, do not be idle, do not be negligent or contemptuous of the daily tasks; but *because* you see it, put on the armour of light, and whether the time between the rising of the whole orb of the sun on the horizon be long or short, fill the hours with triumphant conflict. Put on the whole armour of light.'

Again, note here what the armour is. Of course that phrase, 'the armour of light,' may be nothing more than a little bit of colour put in by a picturesque imagination, and may suggest simply how the burnished steel would shine and glitter when the sunbeams smote it, and the glistening armour, like that of Spenser's Red Cross Knight, would make a kind of light in the dark cave, into which he went. Or it may mean 'the armour that befits the light'; as is perhaps suggested by the antithesis 'the works of darkness,' which are to be 'put off.' These are works that match the darkness, and similarly the armour is to be the armour that befits the light, and that can flash back its beams. But I think there is more than that in the expression. I would rather take the phrase to be parallel to another of this Apostle's, who speaks in 2nd Corinthians of the 'armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.' 'Light' makes the armour, 'righteousness' makes the armour. The two phrases say the same thing, the one in plain English, the other in figure, which being brought down to daily life is just this, that the true armour and weapon of a Christian man is Christian character. 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report,' these are the pieces of armour, and these are the weapons which we are to wield. A Christian man fights against evil in himself by putting on good. The true way to empty the heart of sin is to fill the heart with righteousness. The lances of the light, according to the significant old Greek myth, slew pythons. The armour is 'righteousness on the right hand and on the left.' Stick to plain, simple, homely duties, and you will find that they will defend your heart against many a temptation. A flask that is full of rich wine may be plunged into the saltest ocean, and not a drop will find its way in. Fill your heart with righteousness; your lives—let them glisten in the light, and the light will be your armour. God is light, wherefore God cannot be tempted with evil. 'Walk in the light, as He is in the light' . . . and 'the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.'

But there is another side to that thought, for if you will look, at your leisure, to the closing words of the chapter, you will find the Apostle's own exposition of what putting on the armour of light means. 'Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ'—that is his explanation of putting on 'the armour of light.' For 'once ye were darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord,' and it is in the measure in which we are united to Him, by the faith which binds us to Him, and by the love which works obedience and conformity, that we wear the invulnerable armour of light. Christ Himself is, and He supplies to all, the separate graces which Christian men can wear. We may say that He is 'the panoply of God,' as Paul calls it in Ephesians, and when we wear Him, and only in the measure in which we do wear Him, in that measure are we clothed with it. And so the last thing that I would point out here is that the obedience to these commands requires continual effort.

The Christians in Rome, to whom Paul was writing, were no novices in the Christian life. Long ago many of them had been brought to Him. But the oldest Christian amongst them needed the exhortation as much as the rawest recruit in the ranks. Continual renewal day by day is what we need, and it will not be secured without a great deal of work. Seeing that there is a 'putting off' to go along with the 'putting on,' the process is a very long one. ''Tis a lifelong task till the lump be leavened.' It is a lifelong task till we strip off all the rags of this old self; and 'being clothed,' are not 'found naked.' It takes a lifetime to fathom Jesus; it takes a lifetime to appropriate Jesus, it takes a lifetime to be clothed with Jesus. And the question comes to each of us, have we 'put off the old man with his deeds'? Are we daily, as sure as we put on our clothes in the morning, putting on Christ the Lord?

For notice with what solemnity the Apostle gives the master His full, official, formal title here, 'put ye on the *Lord Jesus Christ*.' Do we put Him on as *Lord*; bowing our whole wills to Him, and accepting Him, His commandments, promises, providences, with glad submission? Do we put on *Jesus*, recognising in His manhood as our Brother not only the pattern of our lives, but the pledge that the pattern, by His help and love, is capable of reproduction in ourselves? Do we put Him on as 'the Lord Jesus *Christ*,' who was anointed with the Divine Spirit, that from the head it might flow, even to the skirts of the garments, and every one of us might partake of that unction and be made pure and clean thereby? 'Put ye on the Lord

Jesus Christ,' and do it day by day, and then you have 'put on the whole armour of God.'

And when the day that is dawning has risen to its full, then, not till then, may we put off the armour and put on the white robe, lay aside the helmet, and have our brows wreathed with the laurel, sheathe the sword, and grasp the palm, being 'more than conquerors through Him who loved us,' and fights in us, as well as for us.

THE LIMITS OF LIBERTY

'So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. 13. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way. 14. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died. 16. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: 17. For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. 18. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. 19. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. 20. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. 21. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. 22. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. 23. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.'—ROMANS xiv. 12-23.

THE special case in view, in the section of which this passage is part, is the difference of opinion as to the lawfulness of eating certain meats. It is of little consequence, so far as the principles involved are concerned, whether these were the food which the Mosaic ordinances made unclean, or, as in Corinth, meats offered to idols. The latter is the more probable, and would be the more important in Rome. The two opinions on the point represented two tendencies of mind, which always exist; one more scrupulous, and one more liberal. Paul has been giving the former class the lesson they needed in the former part of this chapter; and he now turns to the 'stronger' brethren, and lays down the law for their conduct. We may, perhaps, best simply follow him, verse by verse.

We note then, first, the great thought with which he starts, that of the final judgment, in which each man shall give account of himself. What has that to do with the question in hand? This, that it ought to keep us from premature and censorious judging. We have something more pressing to do than to criticise each other. Ourselves are enough to keep our hands full, without taking a lift of our fellows' conduct. And this, further, that, in view of the final judgment, we should hold a preliminary investigation on our own principles of action, and 'decide' to adopt as the overruling law for ourselves, that we shall do nothing which will make duty harder for our brethren. Paul habitually settled small matters on large principles, and brought the solemnities of the final account to bear on the market-place and the meal.

In verse 13 he lays down the supreme principle for settling the case in hand. No Christian is blameless if he voluntarily acts so as to lay a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in another's path. Are these two things the same? Possibly, but a man may stumble, and not fall, and that which makes him stumble may possibly indicate a temptation to a less grave evil than that which makes him fall does. It may be noticed that in the sequel we hear of a brother's being 'grieved' first, and then of his being 'overthrown.' In any case, there is no mistake about the principle laid down and repeated in verse 21. It is a hard saying for some of us. Is my liberty to be restricted by the narrow scruples of 'strait-laced' Christians? Yes. Does not that make them masters, and attach too much importance to their narrowness? No. It recognises Christ as Master, and all His servants as brethren. If the scrupulous ones go so far as to say to the more liberal, 'You cannot be Christians if you do not do as we do,' then the limits of concession have been reached, and we are to do as Paul did, when he flatly refused to yield one hair's-breadth to the Judaisers. If a man says, You must adopt this, that, or the other limitation in conduct, or else you shall be unchurched, the only answer is, I will not. We are to be flexible as long as possible, and let weak brethren's scruples restrain our action. But if they insist on things indifferent as essential, a yet higher duty than that of regard to their weak consciences comes in, and faithfulness to Christ limits concession to His servants.

But, short of that extreme case, Paul lays down the law of curbing liberty in deference to 'narrowness.' In verse 14 he states with equal breadth the extreme principle of the liberal party, that nothing is unclean of itself. He has learned that 'in the Lord Jesus.' Before he was 'in Him,' he had been entangled in cobwebs of legal cleanness and uncleanness; but now he is free. But he adds an exception, which must be kept in mind by the liberal-minded section—namely, that a clean thing is unclean to a man who thinks it is. Of course, these principles do not affect the eternal distinctions of right and wrong. Paul is not playing fast and loose with the solemn, divine law which makes sin and righteousness independent of men's notions. He is speaking of things indifferent — ceremonial observances and the like; and the modern analogies of these are conventional pieces of conduct, in regard to amusements and the like, which, in themselves, a Christian man can do or abstain from without sin.

Verse 15 is difficult to understand, if the 'for' at the beginning is taken strictly. Some commentators would read instead of it a simple 'but,' which smooths the flow of thought. But possibly the verse assigns a reason for the law in verse 13, rather than for the statements in verse 14. And surely there is no stronger reason for tender consideration for even the narrowest scruples of Christians than the obligation to walk in love. Our common brotherhood binds us to do nothing that would even grieve one of the family. For instance, Christian men have different views of the obligations of Sunday observance. It is conceivable that a very 'broad' Christian might see no harm in playing lawn-tennis in his garden on a Sunday; but if his doing so scandalised, or, as Paul says, 'grieved' Christian people of less advanced views, he would be sinning against the law of love if he did it.

There are many other applications of the principle readily suggested. The principle is the thing to keep clearly in view. It has a wide field for its exercise in our times, and when the Christian brotherhood includes such diversities of culture and social condition. And that is a solemn deepening of it, 'Destroy not with thy meat him for whom Christ died.' Note the almost bitter emphasis on 'thy,' which brings out not only the smallness of the gratification for which the mischief is done, but the selfishness of the man who will not yield up so small a thing to shield from evil which may prove fatal, a brother for whom Christ did not shrink from yielding up life. If He is our pattern, any sacrifice of tastes and liberties for our brother's sake is plain duty, and cannot be neglected without selfish sin. One great reason, then, for the conduct enjoined, is set forth in verse 15. It is the clear dictate of Christian love.

Another reason is urged in verses 16 to 18. It displays the true character of Christianity, and so reflects honour on the doer. 'Your good' is an expression for the whole sum of the blessings obtained by becoming Christians, and is closely connected with what is here meant by the 'kingdom of God.' That latter phrase seems here to be substantially equivalent to the inward condition in which they are who have submitted to the dominion of the will of God. It is 'the kingdom within us' which is 'righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.' What have you won by your Christianity? the Apostle in effect says, Do you think that its purpose is mainly to give you greater licence in regard to these matters in question? If the most obvious thing in your conduct is your 'eating and drinking,' your whole Christian standing will be misconceived, and men will fancy that your religion permits laxity of life. But if, on the other hand, you show that you are Christ's servants by righteousness, peace, and joy, you will be pleasing to God, and men will recognise that your religion is from Him, and that you are consistent professors of it.

Modern liberal-minded brethren can easily translate all this for to-day's use. Take care that you do not give the impression that your Christianity has its main operation in permitting you to do what your weaker brethren have scruples about. If you do not yield to them, but flaunt your liberty in their and the world's faces, your advanced enlightenment will be taken by rough-and-ready observers as mainly cherished because it procures you these immunities. Show by your life that you have the true spiritual gifts. Think more about them than about your 'breadth,' and superiority to 'narrow prejudices.' Realise the purpose of the Gospel as concerns your own moral perfecting, and the questions in hand will fall into their right place.

In verses 19 and 20 two more reasons are given for restricting liberty in deference to others' scruples. Such conduct contributes to peace. If truth is imperilled, or Christ's name in danger of being tarnished, counsels of peace are counsels of treachery; but there are not many things worth buying at the price of Christian concord. Such conduct tends to build up our own and others' Christian character. Concessions to the 'weak' may help them to become strong, but flying in the face of their scruples is sure to hurt them, in one way or another.

In verse 15, the case was supposed of a brother's being grieved by what he felt to be laxity. That case corresponded to the stumbling-block of verse 13. A worse result seems contemplated in verse 20,—that of the weak brother, still believing that laxity was wrong, and yet being tempted by the example of the stronger to indulge in it. In that event, the responsibility of overthrowing what God had built lies at the door of the tempter. The metaphor of 'overthrowing' is suggested by the previous one of 'edifying.' Christian duty is mutual building up of character; inconsiderate exercise of 'liberty' may lead to pulling down, by inducing to imitation which conscience condemns.

From this point onwards, the Apostle first reiterates in inverse order his two broad principles, that clean things are unclean to the man who thinks them so, and that Christian obligation requires abstinence from permitted things if our indulgence tends to a brother's hurt. The application of the latter principle to the duty of total abstinence from intoxicants for the sake of others is perfectly legitimate, but it is an application, not the direct purpose of the Apostle's injunctions.

In verses 22 and 23, the section is closed by two exhortations, in which both parties, the strong and the weak, are addressed. The former is spoken to in verse 22, the latter in verse 23. The strong brother is bid to be content with having his wider views, or 'faith'—that is, certainty that his liberty is in accordance with Christ's will. It is enough that he should enjoy that conviction, only let him make sure that he can hold it as in God's sight, and do not let him flourish it in the faces of brethren whom it would grieve, or might lead to imitating his practice, without having risen to his conviction. And let him be quite sure that his conscience is entirely convinced, and not bribed by inclination; for many a man condemns himself by letting wishes dictate to conscience.

On the other hand, there is a danger that those who have scruples should, by the example of those who have not, be tempted to do what they are not quite sure is right. If you have any doubts, says Paul, the safe course is to abstain from the conduct in question. Perhaps a brother can go to the theatre without harm, if he believes it right to do so; but if you have any hesitation as to the propriety of going, you will be condemned as sinning if you do. You must not measure your corn by another man's bushel. Your convictions, not his, are to be your guides. 'Faith' is used here in a somewhat unusual sense. It means certitude of judgment. The last words of verse 23 have no such meaning as is sometimes extracted from them; namely, that actions, however pure and good, done by unbelievers, are of the nature of sin. They simply mean that whatever a Christian man does without clear warrant of his judgment and conscience is sin to him, whatever it is to others.

TWO FOUNTAINS, ONE STREAM

'That we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope. . . . 13. The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.'—ROMANS xv. 4, 13.

THERE is a river in Switzerland fed by two uniting streams, bearing the same name, one of them called the 'white,' one of them the 'grey,' or dark. One comes down from the glaciers, and bears half-melted snow in its white ripple; the other flows through a lovely valley, and is discoloured by its earth. They unite in one common current. So in these two verses we have two streams, a white and a black, and they both blend together and flow out into a common hope. In the former of them we have the dark stream—'through patience and comfort,' which implies affliction and effort. The issue and outcome of all difficulty, trial, sorrow, ought to be hope. And in the other verse we have the other valley, down which the light stream comes: 'The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.'

So both halves of the possible human experience are meant to end in the same blessed result; and whether you go round on the one side of the sphere of human life, or whether you take the other hemisphere, you come to the same point, if you have travelled with God's hand in yours, and with Him for your Guide.

Let us look, then, at these two contrasted origins of the same blessed gift, the Christian hope.

I. We have, first of all, the hope that is the child of the night, and born in the dark.

'Whatsoever things,' says the Apostle, 'were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience,'—or rather *the brave perseverance*—'and consolation'—or rather perhaps *encouragement*—'of the Scriptures might have hope.' The written word is conceived as the source of patient endurance which acts as well as suffers. This grace Scripture works in us through the encouragement which it ministers in manifold ways, and the result of both is hope.

So, you see, our sorrows and difficulties are not connected with, nor do they issue in, bright hopefulness, except by reason of this connecting link. There is nothing in a man's troubles to make him hopeful. Sometimes, rather, they drive him into despair; but at all events, they seldom drive him to hopefulness, except where this link comes in. We cannot pass from the black frowning cliffs on one side of the gorge to the sunny tablelands on the other without a bridge —and the bridge for a poor soul from the blackness of sorrow, and the sharp grim rocks of despair, to the smiling pastures of hope, with all their half-open blossoms, is builded in that Book, which tells us the meaning and purpose of them all; and is full of the histories of those who have fought and overcome, have hoped and not been ashamed.

Scripture is given for this among other reasons, that it may encourage us, and so may produce in us this great grace of active patience, if we may call it so.

The first thing to notice is, how Scripture gives encouragement—for such rather than consolation is the meaning of the word. It is much to dry tears, but it is more to stir the heart as with a trumpet call. Consolation is precious, but we need more for well-being than only to be comforted. And, surely, the whole tone of Scripture in its dealing with the great mystery of pain and sorrow, has a loftier scope than even to minister assuagement to grief, and to stay our weeping. It seeks to make us strong and brave to face and to master our sorrows, and to infuse into us a high-hearted courage, which shall not merely be able to accept the biting blasts, but shall feel that they bring a glow to the cheek and oxygen to the blood, while wrestling with them builds up our strength, and trains us for higher service. It would be a poor aim to comfort only; but to encourage—to make strong in heart, resolved in will, and incapable of being overborne or crushed in spirit by any sorrows—that is a purpose worthy of the Book, and of the God who speaks through it.

This purpose, we may say, is effected by Scripture in two ways. It encourages us by its records, and by its revelation of principles.

Who can tell how many struggling souls have taken heart again, as they pondered over the sweet stories of sorrow subdued which stud its pages, like stars in its firmament? The tears shed long ago which God has put 'in His bottle,' and recorded in 'His book,' have truly been turned into pearls. That long gallery of portraits of sufferers, who have all trodden the same rough road, and been sustained by the same hand, and reached the same home, speaks cheer to all who follow them. Hearts wrung by cruel partings from those dearer to them than their own souls, turn to the pages which tell how Abraham, with calm sorrow, laid his

Sarah in the cave at Macpelah; or how, when Jacob's eyes were dim that he could not see, his memory still turned to the hour of agony when Rachael died by him, and he sees clear in its light her lonely grave, where so much of himself was laid; or to the still more sacred page which records the struggle of grief and faith in the hearts of the sisters of Bethany. All who are anyways afflicted in mind, body, or estate find in the Psalms men speaking their deepest experiences before them; and the grand majesty of sorrow that marks 'the patience of Job,' and the flood of sunshine that bathes him, revealing the 'end of the Lord,' have strengthened countless sufferers to bear and to hold fast, and to hope. We are all enough of children to be more affected by living examples than by dissertations, however true, and so Scripture is mainly history, revealing God by the record of His acts, and disclosing the secret of human life by telling us the experiences of living men.

But Scripture has another method of ministering encouragement to our often fainting and faithless hearts. It cuts down through all the complications of human affairs, and lays bare the innermost motive power. It not only shows us in its narratives the working of sorrow, and the power of faith, but it distinctly lays down the source and the purpose, the whence and the whither of all suffering. No man need quail or faint before the most torturing pains or most disastrous strokes of evil, who holds firmly the plain teaching of Scripture on these two points. They all come *from* my Father, and they all come *for* my good. It is a short and simple creed. easily apprehended. It pretends to no recondite wisdom It is a homely philosophy which common intellects can grasp, which children can understand, and hearts half paralysed by sorrow can take in. So much the better. Grief and pain are so common that their cure had need to be easily obtained. Ignorant and stupid people have to writhe in agony as well as wise and clever ones, and until grief is the portion only of the cultivated classes, its healing must come from something more universal than philosophy; or else the nettle would be more plentiful than the dock; and many a poor heart would be stung to death. Blessed be God! the Christian view of sorrow, while it leaves much unexplained, focuses a steady light on these two points; its origin and its end. 'He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness,' is enough to calm all agitation, and to make the faintest heart take fresh courage. With that double certitude clear before us, we can face anything. The slings and arrows which strike are no more flung blindly by an 'outrageous fortune,' but each bears an inscription, like the fabled bolts, which tells what hand drew the bow, and they come with His love.

Then, further, the courage thus born of the Scriptures produces another grand thing—patience, or rather perseverance. By that word is meant more than simply the passive endurance which is the main element in patience, properly so called. Such passive endurance is a large part of our duty in regard to difficulties and sorrows, but is never the whole of it. It is something to endure and even while the heart is breaking, to submit unmurmuring, but, transcendent as that is, it is but half of the lesson which we have to learn and to put in practice. For if all our sorrows have a disciplinary and educational purpose, we shall not have received them aright, unless we have tried to make that purpose effectual, by appropriating whatsoever moral and spiritual teaching they each have for us. Nor does our duty stop there. For while one high purpose of sorrow is to deaden our hearts to earthly objects, and to lift us above earthly affections, no sorrow can ever relax the bonds which oblige us to duty. The solemn pressure of 'I ought,' is as heavy on the sorrowful as on the happy heart. We have still to toil, to press forward, in the sweat of our brow, to gain our bread, whether it be food for our bodies, or sustenance for our hearts and minds. Our responsibilities to others do not cease because our lives are darkened. Therefore, heavy or light of heart, we have still to stick to our work, and though we may never more be able to do it with the old buoyancy, still to do it with our might.

It is that dogged persistence in plain duty, that tenacious continuance in our course, which is here set forth as the result of the encouragement which Scripture gives. Many of us have all our strength exhausted in mere endurance, and have let obvious duties slip from our hands, as if we had done all that we could do when we had forced ourselves to submit. Submission would come easier if you took up some of those neglected duties, and you would be stronger for patience, if you used more of your strength for service. You do well if you do not sink under your burden, but you would do better if, with it on your shoulders, you would plod steadily along the road; and if you did, you would feel the weight less. It seems heaviest when you stand still doing nothing. Do not cease to toil because you suffer. You will feel your pain more if you do. Take the encouragement which Scripture gives, that it may animate you to bate no jot of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer right onward.

And let the Scripture directly minister to you perseverance as well as indirectly supply it through the encouragement which it gives. It abounds with exhortations, patterns, and motives of such patient continuance in well-doing. It teaches us a solemn scorn of ills. It, angel-like, bears us up on soft, strong hands, lest we bruise ourselves on, or stumble over, the rough places on our roads. It summons us to diligence by the visions of the prize, and glimpses of the dread fate of the slothful, by all that is blessed in hope, and terrible in foreboding, by appeals to an enlightened self-regard, and by authoritative commands to conscience, by the pattern of the Master, and by the tender motives of love to Him to which He, Himself, has given voice. All these call on us to be followers of them who, through faith and perseverance, inherit the promises.

But we have yet another step to take. These two, the encouragement and perseverance produced by the right use of Scripture, will lead to hope.

It depends on how sorrow and trial are borne, whether they produce a dreary hopelessness which sometimes darkens into despair, or a brighter, firmer hope than more joyous days knew. We cannot say that sorrow produces hope. It does not, unless we have this connecting link—the experience in sorrow of a God-given courage which falters not in the onward course, nor shrinks from any duty. But if, in the very press and agony, I am able, by God's grace, to endure nor cease to toil, I have, in myself, a living proof of His power, which entitles me to look forward with the sure confidence that, through all the uproar of the storm, He will bring me to my harbour of rest where there is peace. The lion once slain houses a swarm of bees who lay up honey in its carcase. The trial borne with brave persistence yields a store of sweet hopes. If we can look back and say, 'Thou hast been with me in six troubles,' it is good logic to look forward and say, 'and in seven Thou wilt not forsake me.' When the first wave breaks over the ship, as she clears the heads and heels over before the full power of the open sea, inexperienced landsmen think they are all going to the bottom, but they soon learn that there is a long way between rolling and foundering, and get to watch the highest waves towering above the bows in full confidence that these also will slip quietly beneath the keel as the others have done, and be left harmless astern.

The Apostle, in this very same letter, has another word parallel to this, in which he describes the issues of rightly-borne suffering when he says, 'Tribulation worketh perseverance'—the same word that is used here—'and perseverance worketh' the proof in our experience of a sustaining God; and the proof in our experience of a sustaining God works hope. We know that of ourselves we could not have met tribulation, and therefore the fact that we have been able to meet and overcome it is demonstration of a mightier power than our own, working in us, which we know to be from God, and therefore inexhaustible and ever ready to help. That is foundation firm enough to build solid fabrics of hope upon, whose bases go down to the centre of all things, the purpose of God, and whose summits, like the upward shooting spire of some cathedral, aspire to, and seem almost to touch, the heavens.

So hope is born of sorrow, when these other things come between. The darkness gives birth to the light, and every grief blazes up a witness to a future glory. Each drop that hangs on the wet leaves twinkles into rainbow light that proclaims the sun. The garish splendours of the prosperous day hide the stars, and through the night of our sorrow there shine, thickly sown and steadfast, the constellations of eternal hopes. The darker the midnight, the surer, and perhaps the nearer, the coming of the day. Sorrow has not had its perfect work unless it has led us by the way of courage and perseverance to a stable hope. Hope has not pierced to the rock, and builds only 'things that can be shaken,' unless it rests on sorrows borne by God's help.

II. So much then for the genealogy of one form of the Christian hope. But we have also a hope that is born of the day, the child of sunshine and gladness; and that is set before us in the second of the two verses which we are considering, 'The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.'

So then, 'the darkness and the light are both alike' to our hope, in so far as each may become the occasion for its exercise. It is not only to be the sweet juice expressed from our hearts by the winepress of calamities, but that which flows of itself from hearts ripened and mellowed under the sunshine of God-given blessedness.

We have seen that the bridge by which sorrow led to hope, is perseverance and courage; in this second analysis of the origin of hope, joy and peace are the bridge by which Faith passes over into it. Observe the difference: there is no direct connection between affliction and hope, but there is between joy and hope. We have no right to say, 'Because I suffer, I shall possess good in the future'; but we have a right to say, 'Because I rejoice'—of course with a joy in God—'I shall never cease to rejoice in Him.' Such joy is the prophet of its own immortality and completion. And, on the other hand, the joy and peace which are naturally the direct progenitors of Christian hope, are the children of faith. So that we have here two generations, as it were, of hope's ancestors;—Faith produces joy and peace, and these again produce hope.

Faith leads to joy and peace. Paul has found, and if we only put it to the proof, we shall also find, that the simple exercise of simple faith fills the soul with '*all* joy and peace.' Gladness in all its variety and in full measure, calm repose in every kind and abundant in its still depth, will pour into my heart as water does into a vessel, on condition of my taking away the barrier and opening my heart through faith. Trust and thou shalt be glad. Trust, and thou shalt be calm. In the measure of thy trust shall be the measure of thy joy and peace.

Notice, further, how indissolubly connected the present exercise of faith is with the present experience of joy and peace. The exuberant language of this text seems a world too wide for anything that many professing Christians ever know even in the moments of highest elevation, and certainly far beyond the ordinary tenor of their lives. But it is no wonder that these should have so little joy, when they have so little faith. It is only while we are looking to Jesus that we can expect to have joy and peace. There is no flashing light on the surface of the mirror, but when it is turned full to the sun. Any interruption in the electric current is registered accurately by an interruption in the continuous line perforated on the telegraph ribbon; and so every diversion of heart and faith from Jesus Christ is recorded by the fading of the sunshine out of the heart, and the silencing of all the song-birds. Yesterday's faith will not bring joy to-day; you cannot live upon past experience, nor feed your souls with the memory of former exercises of Christian faith. It must be like the manna, gathered fresh every day, else it will rot and smell foul. A present faith, and a present faith only, produces a present joy and peace. Is there, then, any wonder that so much of the ordinary experience of ordinary Christians should present a sadly broken line—a bright point here and there, separated by long stretches of darkness? The gaps in the continuity of their joy are the tell-tale indicators of the interruptions in their faith. If the latter were continuous, the former would be unbroken. Always believe, and you will always be glad and calm.

It is easy to see that this is the natural result of faith. The very act of confident reliance on another for all my safety and well-being has a charm to make me restful, so long as my reliance is not put to shame. There is no more blessed emotion than the tranquil happiness which, in the measure of its trust, fills every trustful soul. Even when its objects are poor, fallible, weak, ignorant dying men and women, trust brings a breath of more than earthly peace into the heart. But when it grasps the omnipotent, all-wise, immortal Christ, there are no bounds but its own capacity to the blessedness which it brings into the soul, because there is none to the all-sufficient grace of which it lays hold.

Observe again how accurately the Apostle defines for us the conditions on which Christian experience will be joyful and tranquil. It is 'in believing,' not in certain other exercises of mind, that these blessings are to be realised. And the forgetfulness of that plain fact leads to many good people's religion being very much more gloomy and disturbed than God meant it to be. For a large part of it consists in sadly testing their spiritual state, and gazing at their failures and imperfections. There is nothing cheerful or tranquillising in grubbing among the evils of your own heart, and it is quite possible to do that too much and too exclusively. If your favourite subject of contemplation in your religious thinking is yourself, no wonder that you do not get much joy and peace out of that. If you do, it will be of a false kind. If you are thinking more about your own imperfections than about Christ's pardon, more about the defects of your own love to Him than about the perfection of His love to you, if instead of practising faith you are absorbed in self-examination, and instead of saying to yourself, 'I know how foul and unworthy I am, but I look away from myself to my Saviour,' you are bewailing your sins and doubting whether you are a Christian, you need not expect God's angels of joy and peace to nestle in your heart. It is 'in believing,' and not in other forms of religious contemplation, however needful these may in their places be, that these fair twin sisters come to us and make their abode with us.

Then, the second step in this tracing of the origin of the hope which has the brighter source is the consideration that the joy and peace which spring from faith, in their turn produce that confident anticipation of future and progressive good.

Herein lies the distinguishing blessedness of the Christian joy and peace, in that they carry in themselves the pledge of their own eternity. Here, and here only, the mad boast which is doomed to be so miserably falsified when applied to earthly gladness is simple truth. Here 'to-morrow *shall* be as this day and much more abundant.' Such joy has nothing in itself which betokens exhaustion, as all the less pure joys of earth have. It is manifestly not born for death, as are they. It is not fated, like all earthly emotions or passions, to expire in the moment of its completeness, or even by sudden revulsion to be succeeded by its opposite. Its sweetness has no after pang of bitterness. It is not true of this gladness, that 'Hereof cometh in the end despondency and madness,' but its destiny is to 'remain' as long as the soul in which it unfolds shall exist, and 'to be full' as long as the source from which it flows does not run dry.

So that the more we experience the present blessedness, which faith in Christ brings us, the more shall we be sure that nothing in the future, either in or beyond time, can put an end to it; and hence a hope that looks with confident eyes across the gorge of death, to the 'shining tablelands' on the other side, and is as calm as certitude, shall be ours. To the Christian soul, rejoicing in the conscious exercise of faith and the conscious possession of its blessed results, the termination of a communion with Christ, so real and spiritual, by such a trivial accident as death, seems wildly absurd and therefore utterly impossible. Just as Christ's Resurrection seems inevitable as soon as we grasp the truth of His divine nature, and it becomes manifestly impossible that He, being such as He is—

should be holden of death,' being such as it is, so for His children, when once they come to know the realities of fellowship with their Lord, they feel the entire dissimilarity of these to anything in the realm which is subjected to the power of death, and to know it to be as impossible that these purely spiritual experiences should be reduced to inactivity, or meddled with by it, as that a thought should be bound with a cord or a feeling fastened with fetters. They, and death, belong to two different regions. It can work its will on 'this wide world, and all its fading sweets'—but is powerless in the still place where the soul and Jesus hold converse, and all His joy passes into His servant's heart. I saw, not long since, in a wood a mass of blue wild hyacinths, that looked like a little bit of heaven dropped down upon earth. You and I may have such a tiny bit of heaven itself lying amidst all the tangle of our daily lives, if only we put our trust in Christ, and so get into our hearts some little portion of that joy that is unspeakable, and that peace that passeth understanding.

Thus, then, the sorrows of the earthly experience and the joys of the Christian life will blend together to produce the one blessed result of a hope that is full of certainty, and is the assurance of immortality. There is no rainbow in the sky unless there be both a black cloud and bright sunshine. So, on the blackest, thickest thunder-mass of our sorrows, if smitten into moist light by the sunshine of joy and peace drawn from Jesus Christ by faith, there may be painted the rainbow of hope, the many-coloured, steadfast token of the faithful covenant of the faithful God.

JOY AND PEACE IN BELIEVING

'The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.'—ROMANS xv. 13.

WITH this comprehensive and lofty petition the Apostle closes his exhortation to the factions in the Roman Church to be at unity. The form of the prayer is moulded by the last words of a quotation which he has just made, which says that in the coming Messiah 'shall the Gentiles hope.' But the prayer itself is not an instance of being led away by a word—in form, indeed, it is shaped by verbal resemblance; in substance it points to the true remedy for religious controversy. Fill the contending parties with a fuller spiritual life, and the ground of their differences will begin to dwindle, and look very contemptible. When the tide rises, the little pools on the rocks are all merged into one.

But we may pass beyond the immediate application of these words, and see in them the wish, which is also a promise, and like the exhibition of every ideal is a command. This is Paul's conception of the Christian life as it might and should be, in one aspect. You notice that there is not a word in it about conduct. It goes far deeper than action. It deals with the springs of action in the individual life. It is the depths of spiritual experience here set forth which will result in actions that become a Christian. And in these days, when all around us we see a shallow conception of Christianity, as if it were concerned principally with conduct and men's relations with one another, it is well to go down into the depths, and to remember that whilst 'Do, do, do!' is very important, 'Be, be, be!' is the primary commandment. Conduct is a making visible of personality, and the Scripture teaching which says first faith and then works is profoundly philosophical as well as Christian. So we turn away here from externals altogether, and regard the effect of Christianity on the inward life.

I. I wish to notice man's faith and God's filling as connected, and as the foundation of everything.

'The God of hope fill you . . .'—let us leave out the intervening words for a moment—'in believing.' Now, you notice that Paul does not stay to tell us what or whom we are to believe in, or on. He takes that for granted, and his thought is fastened, for the moment, not on the object but on the act of faith. And he wishes to drive home to us this, that the attitude of trust is the necessary prerequisite condition of God's being able to fill a man's soul, and that God's being able to fill a man's soul is the necessary consequence of a man's trust. Ah, brethren, we cannot altogether shut God out from our spirits. There are loving and gracious gifts that, as our Lord tells us, He makes to 'fall on the unthankful and the evil.' His rain is not like the summer showers that we sometimes see, that fall in one spot and leave another dry; nor like the destructive thunderstorms, that come down bringing ruin upon one cane-brake and leave the plants in the next standing upright. But the best, the highest, the truly divine gifts which He is yearning to give to us all, cannot be given except there be consent, trust, and desire for them. You can shut your hearts or you can open them. And just as the wind will sigh round some hermetically closed chamber in vain search for a cranny, and the man within may be asphyxiated though the atmosphere is surging up its waves all round his closed domicile, so by lack of our faith, which is at once trust, consent, and desire, we shut out the gift with which God would fain fill our spirits. You can take a porous pottery vessel, wrap it up in waxcloth, pitch it all over, and then drop it into mid-Atlantic, and not a drop will find its way in. And that is what we can do with ourselves, so that although in Him 'we live and move and have our being,' and are like the earthen vessel in the ocean, no drop of the blessed moisture will ever find its way into the heart. There must be man's faith before there can be God's filling.

Further, this relation of the two things suggests to us that a consequence of a Christian man's faith is the direct action of God upon him. Notice how the Apostle puts that truth in a double form here, in order that he may emphasise it, using one form of expression, involving the divine, direct activity, at the beginning of his prayer, and another at the end, and so enclosing, as it were, within a great casket of the divine action, all the blessings, the flashing jewels, which he desires his Roman friends to possess. 'The God of hope fill you . . . through the power of the Holy Ghost.' I wish I could find words by which I could bear in upon the ordinary type of the Evangelical Christianity of this generation anything like the depth and earnestness of my own conviction that, for lack of a proportionate development of that great truth, of the direct action of the giving God on the believing heart, it is weakened and harmed in many ways. Surely He that made my spirit can touch my spirit; surely He who filleth all things according to their capacity can Himself enter into and fill the spirit which is opened for Him by simple faith. We do not need wires for the telegraphy between heaven and the believing soul, but He comes directly to, and speaks in, and moves upon, and moulds and blesses, the waiting heart. And until you know, by your own experience rightly interpreted, that there is such a direct communion between the giving God and the recipient believing spirit, you have yet to learn the deepest depth, and the most blessed blessedness, of Christian faith and experience. For lack of it a hundred evils beset modern Christianity. For lack of it men fix their faith so exclusively as that the faith is itself harmed thereby, on the past act of Christ's death on the Cross. You will not suspect me of minimising that, but I beseech you remember one climax of the Apostle's which, though not bearing the same message as my text, is in harmony with it, 'Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' And remember that Christ Himself bestows the gift of His Divine Spirit as the result of the humiliation and the agony of His Cross. Faith brings the direct action of the giving God.

And one more word about this first part of my text: the result of that direct action is complete—'the God of hope fill you' with no shrunken stream, no painful trickle out of a narrow rift in the rock, but a great exuberance which will pass into a man's nature in the measure of his capacity, which is the measure of his trust and desire. There are two limits to God's gifts to men: the one is the limitless limit of God's infinitude, the other is the working limit—our capacity—and that capacity is precisely measured, as the capacity of some built-in vessel might be measured by a little gauge on the outside, by our faith. 'The God of hope' fills you in 'believing,' and 'according to thy faith shall it be unto thee.'

II. Notice the joy and peace which come from the direct action of the God of hope on the believer's soul.

Now, it is not only towards God that we exercise trust, but wherever it is exercised, to some extent, and in the measure in which the object on which it rests is discovered by experience to be worthy, it produces precisely these results. Whoever trusts is at peace, just as much as he trusts. His confidence may be mistaken, and there will come a tremendous awakening if it is, and the peace will be shattered like some crystal vessel dashed upon an iron pavement, but so long as a man's mind and heart are in the attitude of dependence upon another, conceived to be dependable, one knows that there are few phases of tranquillity and blessedness which are sweeter and deeper than that. 'The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her'—that is one illustration, and a hundred more might be given. And if you will take that attitude of trust which, even when it twines round some earthly prop, is upheld for a time, and bears bright flowers—if you take it and twine it round the steadfast foundations of the Throne of God, what can shake that sure repose? 'Joy and peace' will come when the Christian heart closes with its trust, which is God in Christ.

He that believes has found the short, sure road to joy and peace, because his relations are set right with God. For these relations are the disturbing elements in all earthly tranquillity, and like the skeleton at the feast in all earthly joy, and a man can never, down to the roots of his being, be at rest until he is quite sure that there is nothing wrong between him and God. And so believing, we come to that root of all real gladness which is anything better than a crackling of thorns under a pot, and to that beginning of all true tranquillity. Joy in the Lord and peace with God are the parents of all joy and peace that are worthy of the name.

And that same faith will again bring these two bright-winged angels into the most saddened and troubled lives, because that faith brings right relations with ourselves. For our inward strifes stuff thorns into the pillow of our repose, and mingle bitterness with the sweetest, foaming draughts of our earthly joys. If a man's conscience and inclinations pull him two different ways, he is torn asunder as by wild horses. If a man has a hungry heart, for ever yearning after unattained and impossible blessings, then there is no rest there. If a man's little kingdom within him is all anarchical, and each passion and appetite setting up for itself, then there is no tranquillity. But if by faith we let the God of hope come in, then hungry hearts are satisfied, and warring dispositions are harmonised, and the conscience becomes quieted, and fair imaginations fill the chamber of the spirit, and the man is at rest, because he himself is unified by the faith and fear of God.

And the same faith brings joy and peace because it sets right our relations with other people, and with all externals. If I am living in an atmosphere of trust, then sorrow will never be absolute, nor have exclusive monopoly and possession of my spirit. But there will be the paradox, and the blessedness, of Christian experience, 'as sorrowful yet always rejoicing.' For the joy of the Christian life has its source far away beyond the swamps from which the sour drops of sorrow may trickle, and it is possible that, like the fabled fire that burned under water, the joy of the Lord may be bright in my heart, even when it is drenched in floods of calamity and distress.

And so, brethren, the joy and peace that come from faith will fill the heart which trusts. Only remember how emphatically the Apostle here puts these two things together, 'joy and peace in believing.' As long as, and not a moment longer than, you are exercising the Christian act of trust, will you be experiencing the Christian blessedness of 'joy and peace.' Unscrew the pipe, and in an instant the water ceases to flow. Touch the button and switch off, and out goes the light. Some Christian people fancy they can live upon past faith. You will get no present joy and peace out of past faith. The rain of this day twelve months will not moisten the parched ground of to-day. Yesterday's religion was all used up yesterday. And if you would have a continuous flow of joy and peace through your lives, keep up a uniform habit and attitude of trust in God. You will get it then; you will get it in no other way.

III. Lastly, note the hope which springs from this experience of joy and peace.

'The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.' Here, again, the Apostle does not trouble himself to define the object of the hope. In this, as in the former clause, his attention is fixed upon the emotion, not upon that towards which it goes out. And just as there was no need to say in whom it was that the Christian man was to believe, so there is no room to define what it is that the Christian man has a right to hope for. For his hope is intended to cover all the future, the next moment, or to-morrow, or the dimmest distance where time has ceased to be, and eternity stands unmoved. The attitude of the Christian mind ought to be a cheery optimism, an unconquerable hope. 'The best has yet to be' is the true Christian thought in contemplating the future for myself, for my dear ones, for God's Church, and for God's universe.

And the truest basis on which that hope can rest is the experience granted to us, on condition of our faith, of a present, abundant possession of the joy and peace which God gives. The gladder you are to-day, if the gladness comes from the right source, the surer you may be that that gladness will never end. That is not what befalls men who live by earthly joys. For the more poignant, precious, and, as we faithlessly think, indispensable some of these are to us, the more into their sweetest sweetness creeps the dread thought: 'This is too good to last; this must pass.' We never need to think that about the peace and joy that come to us through believing. For they, in their sweetness, prophesy perpetuity. I need not dwell upon the thought that the firmest, most personally precious convictions of an eternity of future blessedness, rise and fall in a Christian consciousness with the purity and the depth of its own experience of the peace and joy of the Gospel. The more you have of Jesus Christ in your lives and hearts to-day, the surer you will be that whatever death may do, it cannot touch that, and the more ludicrously impossible it will seem that anything that befalls this poor body can touch the bond that knits us to Jesus Christ. Death can separate us from a great deal. Its sharp scythe cuts through all other bonds, but its edge is turned when it is tried against the golden chain that binds the believing soul to the Christ in whom he has believed.

So, brethren, there is the ladder—begin at the bottom step, with faith in Jesus Christ. That will bring God's direct action into your spirit, through His Holy Spirit, and that one gift will break up into an endless multiplicity of blessings, just as a beam of light spilt upon the surface of the ocean breaks into diamonds in every wave, and that 'joy and peace' will kindle in your hearts a hope fed by the great words of the Lord: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,' 'My joy shall remain in you, and your joy shall be full,' 'He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.'

PHŒBE

'I commend unto you Phœbe our sister, who is a servant of the Church that is at Cenchrea: 2. That ye receive her in the Lord, worthily of the Saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever matter she may have need of you: for she herself hath been a succourer of many, and of mine own self.'—ROMANS xvi. 1, 2 (R.V.).

THIS is an outline picture of an else wholly unknown person. She, like most of the other names mentioned in the salutations in this chapter, has had a singular fate. Every name, shadowy and unreal as it is to us, belonged to a human life filled with hopes and fears, plunged sometimes in the depths of sorrows, struggling with anxieties and difficulties; and all the agitations have sunk into forgetfulness and calm. There is left to the world an immortal remembrance, and scarcely a single fact associated with the undying names.

Note the person here disclosed.

A little rent is made in the dark curtain through which we see as with an incandescent light concentrated for a moment upon her, one of the many good women who helped Paul, as their sisters had helped Paul's Master, and who thereby have won, little as either Paul or she thought it, an eternal commemoration Her name is a purely idolatrous one, and stamps her as a Greek, and by birth probably a worshipper of Apollo. Her Christian associations were with the Church at Cenchrea, the port of Corinth, of which little Christian community nothing further is known. But if we take into account the hideous immoralities of Corinth, we shall deem it probable that the port, with its shifting maritime population, was, like most seaports, a soil in which goodness was hard put to it to grow, and a church had much against which to struggle. To be a Christian at Cenchrea can have been no light task. Travellers in Egypt are told that Port Said is the wickedest place on the face of the earth; and in Phœbe's home there would be a like drift of disreputables of both sexes and of all nationalities. It was fitting that one good woman should be recorded as redeeming womanhood there. We learn of her that she was a 'servant,' or, as the margin preferably reads, a 'deaconess of the Church which is at Cenchrea'; and in that capacity, by gentle ministrations and the exhibition of purity and patient love, as well as by the gracious administration of material help, had been a 'succourer of many.' There is a whole world of unmentioned kindnesses and a life of self-devotion hidden away under these few words. Possibly the succour which she administered was her own gift. She may have been rich and influential, or perhaps she but distributed the Church's bounty; but in any ease the gift was sweetened by the giver's hand, and the succour was the impartation of a woman's sympathy more than the bestowment of a donor's gift. Sometime or other, and somehow or other, she had had the honour and joy of helping Paul, and no doubt that opportunity would be to her a crown of service. She was now on the point of taking the long journey to Rome on her own business, and the Apostle bespeaks for her help from the Roman Church 'in whatsoever matter she may have need of you,' as if she had some difficult affair on hand, and had no other friends in the city. Possibly then she was a widow, and perhaps had had some lawsuit or business with government authorities, with whom a word from some of her brethren in Rome might stand her in good stead. Apparently she was the bearer of this epistle, which would give her a standing at once in the Roman Church, and she came among them with a halo round her from the whole-hearted commendation of the Apostle.

Mark the lessons from this little picture.

We note first the remarkable illustration here given of the power of the new bond of a common faith. The world was then broken up into sections, which were sometimes bitterly antagonistic and at others merely rigidly exclusive. The only bond of union was the iron fetter of Rome, which crushed the people, but did not knit them together. But here are Paul the Jew, Phœbe the Greek, and the Roman readers of the epistle, all fused together by the power of the divine love that melted their hearts, and the common faith that unified their lives. The list of names in this chapter, comprising as it does men and women of many nationalities, and some slaves as well as freemen, is itself a wonderful testimony of the truth of Paul's triumphant exclamation in another epistle, that in Christ there is 'neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female.'

The clefts have closed, and the very line of demarcation is obliterated; and these clefts were deeper than any of which we moderns have had experience. It remains something like a miracle that the members of Paul's churches could ever be brought together, and that their consciousness of oneness could ever overpower the tremendous divisive forces. We sometimes wonder at their bickerings; we ought rather to wonder at their unity, and be ashamed of the importance which we attach to our infinitely slighter mutual disagreements. The bond that was sufficient to make the early Christians all one in Christ Jesus seems to have lost its binding power to-day, and, like an used-up elastic band, to have no clasping grip left in it.

Another thought which we may connect with the name of Phœbe is the characteristic place of women in Christianity.

The place of woman amongst the Jews was indeed free and honourable as compared with her position either in Greece or Rome, but in none of them was she placed on the level of man, nor regarded mainly in the aspect of an equal possessor of the same life of the Spirit. But a religion which admits her to precisely the same position of a supernatural life as is granted to man, necessarily relegates to a subordinate position all differences of sex as it does all other natural distinctions. The women who ministered to Jesus of their substance, the two sisters of Bethany, the mourners at Calvary, the three who went through the morning twilight to the tomb, were but the foremost conspicuous figures in a great company through all the ages who have owed to Jesus their redemption, not only from the slavery of sin, but from the stigma of inferiority as man's drudge or toy. To the world in which Paul lived it was a strange, new thought that women could share with man in his loftiest emotions. Historically the emancipation of one half of the human race is the direct result of the Christian principle that all are one in Christ Jesus. In modern life the emancipation has been too often divorced from its one sure basis, and we have become familiar with the sight of the 'advanced' women who have advanced so far as to have lost sight of the Christ to whom they owe their freedom. The picture of Phœbe in our text might well be commended to all such as setting forth the most womanlike ideal. She was 'a succourer of many.' Her ministry was a ministry of help; and surely such gentle ministry is that which most befits the woman's heart and comes most graciously to the woman's fingers.

Phœbe then may well represent to us the ministry of succour in this world of woe and need. There is ever a cry, even in apparently successful lives, for help and a helper. Man's clumsy hand is but too apt to hurt where it strives to soothe, and nature itself seems to devolve on the swifter sympathies and more delicate perceptions of woman the joy of binding up wounded spirits. In the verses immediately following our text we read of another woman to whom was entrusted a more conspicuous and direct form of service. Priscilla 'taught Apollos the way of God more perfectly,' and is traditionally represented as being united with her husband in evangelistic work. But it is not merely prejudice which takes Phœbe rather than Priscilla as the characteristic type of woman's special ministry. We must remember our Lord's teaching, that the giver of 'a cup of cold water in the name of a prophet' in some measure shares in the prophet's work, and will surely share in the prophet's reward. She who helped Paul must have entered into the spirit of Paul's labours; and He to whom all service that is done from the same motive is one in essence, makes no difference between him whose thirsty lips drink and her whose loving hand presents the cup of cold water. 'Small service is true service while it lasts.' Paul and Phœbe were one in ministry and one in its recompense.

We may further see in her a foreshadowing of the reward of lowly service, though it be only the service of help. Little did Phœbe dream that her name would have an eternal commemoration of her unnoticed deeds of kindness and aid, standing forth to later generations and peoples of whom she knew nothing, as worthy of eternal remembrance. For those of us who have to serve unnoticed and unknown, here is an instance and a prophecy which may stimulate and encourage. 'Surely I will never forget any of their works' is a gracious promise which the most obscure and humble of us may take to heart, and sustained by which, we may patiently pursue a way on which there are 'none to praise and very few to love.' It matters little whether our work be noticed or recorded by men, so long as we know that it is written in the Lamb's book of life and that He will one day proclaim it 'before the Father in heaven and His angels.'

PRISCILLA AND AQUILA

'Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus; 4. (Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but so all the churches of the Gentiles:) 5. Likewise greet the church that is in their house.'—ROMANS xvi. 3-5.

It has struck me that this wedded couple present, even in the scanty notices that we have of them, some interesting points which may be worth while gathering together.

Now, to begin with, we are told that Aquila was a Jew. We are not told whether Priscilla was a Jewess or no. So far as her name is concerned, she may have been, and very probably was, a Roman, and, if so, we have in their case a 'mixed marriage,' such as was not uncommon then, and of which Timothy's parents give another example. She is sometimes called Prisca, which was her proper name, and sometimes Priscilla, an affectionate diminutive. The two had been living in Rome, and had been banished under the decree of the Emperor, just as Jews have been banished from England and from every country in Europe again and again. They came from Rome to Corinth, and were, perhaps, intending to go back to Aquila's native place, Pontus, when Paul met them in the latter city, and changed their whole lives. His association with them began in a purely commercial partnership. But as they abode together and worked at their trade, there would be many earnest talks about the Christ, and these ended in both husband and wife becoming disciples. The bond thus knit was too close to be easily severed, and so, when Paul sailed across the Ægean for Ephesus, his two new friends kept with him, which they would be the more ready to do, as they had no settled home. They remained with him during his somewhat lengthened stay in the great Asiatic city; for we find in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, which was written from Ephesus about that time, that the Apostle sends greetings from 'Priscilla and Aquila and the Church which is in their house.' But when Paul left Ephesus they seem to have stayed behind, and afterwards to have gone their own way.

About a year after the first Epistle to the Corinthians was sent from Ephesus, the Epistle to the Romans was written, and we find there the salutation to Priscilla and Aquila which is my text. So this wandering couple were back again in Rome by that time, and settled down there for a while. They are then lost sight of for some time, but probably they returned to Ephesus. Once more we catch a glimpse of them in Paul's last letter, written some seven or eight years after that to the Romans. The Apostle knows that death is near, and, at that supreme moment, his heart goes out to these two faithful companions, and he sends them a parting token of his undying love. There are only two messages to friends in the second Epistle to Timothy, and one of these is to Prisca and Aquila. At the mouth of the valley of the shadow of death he remembered the old days in Corinth, and the, to us, unknown instance of devotion which these two had shown, when, for his life, they laid down their own necks.

Such is all that we know of Priscilla and Aquila. Can we gather any lessons from these scattered notices thus thrown together?

I. Here is an object lesson as to the hallowing effect of Christianity on domestic life and love.

Did you ever notice that in the majority of the places where these two are named, if we adopt the better readings, Priscilla's name comes first? She seems to have been 'the better man of the two'; and Aquila drops comparatively into the background. Now, such a couple, and a couple in which the wife took the foremost place, was an absolute impossibility in heathenism. They are a specimen of what Christianity did in the primitive age, all over the Empire, and is doing to-day, everywhere—lifting woman to her proper place. These two, yoked together in 'all exercise of noble end,' and helping one another in Christian work, and bracketed together by the Apostle, who puts the wife first, as his fellow-helpers in Christ Jesus, stands before us as a living picture of what our sweet and sacred family life and earthly loves may be glorified into, if the light from heaven shines down upon them, and is thankfully received into them.

Such a house as the house of Prisca and Aquila is the product of Christianity, and such ought to be the house of every professing Christian. For we should all make our homes as 'tabernacles of the righteous,' in which the voice of joy and rejoicing is ever heard. Not only wedded love, but family love, and all earthly love, are then most precious, when into them there flows the ennobling, the calming, the transfiguring thought of Christ and His love to us.

Again, notice that, even in these scanty references to our two friends, there twice occurs that remarkable expression 'the church that is in their house.' Now, I suppose that that gives us a little glimpse into the rudimentary condition of public worship in the primitive church. It was centuries after the time of Priscilla and Aquila before circumstances permitted Christians to have buildings devoted exclusively to public worship. Up to a very much later period than that which is covered by the New Testament, they gathered together wherever was most convenient. And, I suppose, that both in Rome and Ephesus, this husband and wife had some room—perhaps the workshop where they made their tents, spacious enough for some of the Christians of the city to meet together in. One would like people who talk so much about 'the Church,' and refuse the name to individual societies of Christians, and even to an aggregate of these, unless it has 'bishops,' to explain how the little gathering of twenty or thirty people in the workshop attached to Aquila's house, is called by the Apostle without hesitation 'the church which is in their house.' It *was* a part of the Holy Catholic Church, but it was also 'a Church,' complete in itself, though small in numbers. We have here not only a glimpse into the manner of public worship in early times, but we may learn something of far more consequence for us, and find here a suggestion of what our homes ought to be. 'The Church that is in thy house'—fathers and mothers that are responsible for your homes and their religious atmosphere, ask yourselves if any one would say that about your houses, and if they could not, why not?

II. We may get here another object lesson as to the hallowing of common life, trade, and travel.

It does not appear that, after their stay in Ephesus, Aquila and his wife were closely attached to Paul's person, and certainly they did not take any part as members of what we may call his evangelistic staff. They seem to have gone their own way, and as far as the scanty notices carry us, they did not meet Paul again, after the time when they parted in Ephesus. Their gipsy life was probably occasioned by Aquila's going about—as was the custom in old days when there were no trades-unions or organised centres of a special industry—to look for work where he could find it. When he had made tents in Ephesus for a while, he would go on somewhere else, and take temporary lodgings there. Thus he wandered about as a working man. Yet Paul calls him his 'fellow worker in Christ

Jesus'; and he had, as we saw, a Church in his house. A roving life of that sort is not generally supposed to be conducive to depth of spiritual life. But their wandering course did not hurt these two. They took their religion with them. It did not depend on locality, as does that of a great many people who are very religious in the town where they live, and, when they go away for a holiday, seem to leave their religion, along with their silver plate, at home. But no matter whether they were in Corinth or Ephesus or Rome, Aquila and Priscilla took their Lord and Master with them, and while working at their camel's-hair tents, they were serving God.

Dear brethren, what we want is not half so much preachers such as my brethren and I, as Christian tradesmen and merchants and travellers, like Aquila and Priscilla.

III. Again, we may see here a suggestion of the unexpected issues of our lives.

Think of that complicated chain of circumstances, one end of which was round Aquila and the other round the young Pharisee in Jerusalem. It steadily drew them together until they met in that lodging at Corinth. Claudius, in the fullness of his absolute power, said, 'Turn all these wretched Jews out of my city. I will not have it polluted with them any more. Get rid of them!' So these two were uprooted, and drifted to Corinth. We do not know why they chose to go thither; perhaps they themselves did not know why; but God knew. And while they were coming thither from the west, Paul was coming thither from the east and north. He was 'prevented by the Spirit from speaking in Asia,' and driven across the sea against his intention to Neapolis, and hounded out of Philippi and Thessalonica and Berœa; and turned superciliously away from Athens; and so at last found himself in Corinth, face to face with the tent-maker from Rome and his wife. Then one of the two men said, 'Let us join partnership together, and set up here as tent-makers for a time.' What came out of this unintended and apparently chance meeting?

The first thing was the conversion of Aquila and his wife; and the effects of that are being realised by them in heaven at this moment, and will go on to all eternity.

So, in the infinite complexity of events, do not let us worry ourselves by forecasting, but let us trust, and be sure that the Hand which is pushing us is pushing us in the right direction, and that He will bring us, by a right, though a roundabout way, to the City of Habitation. It seems to me that we poor, blind creatures in this world are somewhat like a man in a prison, groping with his hand in the dark along the wall, and all unawares touching a spring which moves a stone, disclosing an aperture that lets in a breath of purer air, and opens the way to freedom. So we go on as if stumbling in the dark, and presently, without our knowing what we do, by some trivial act we originate a train of events which influences our whole future.

Again, when Aquila and Priscilla reached Ephesus they formed another chance acquaintance in the person of a brilliant young Alexandrian, whose name was Apollos. They found that he had good intentions and a good heart, but a head very scantily furnished with the knowledge of the Gospel. So they took him in hand, just as Paul had taken them. If I may use such a phrase, they did not know how large a fish they had caught. They had no idea what a mighty power for Christ was lying dormant in that young man from Alexandria who knew so much less than they did. They instructed Apollos, and Apollos became second only to Paul in the power of preaching the Gospel. So the circle widens and widens. God's grace fructifies from one man to another, spreading onward and outward. And all Apollos' converts, and *their* converts, and *theirs* again, right away down the ages, we may trace back to Priscilla and Aquila.

So do not let us be anxious about the further end of our deeds—viz. their results; but be careful about the nearer end of them—viz. their motives; and God will look after the other end. Seeing that 'thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that,' or how much any of them will prosper, let us grasp *all* opportunities to do His will and glorify His name.

IV. Further, here we have an instance of the heroic self-devotion which love to Christ kindles.

'For my sake they laid down their own necks.' We do not know to what Paul is referring: perhaps to that tumult in Ephesus, where he certainly was in danger. But the language seems rather more emphatic than such danger would warrant. Probably it was at some perilous juncture of which we know nothing (for we know very little, after all, of the details of the Apostle's life), in which Aquila and Priscilla had said, 'Take us and let him go. He can do a great deal more for God than we can do. We will put our heads on the block, if he may still live.' That magnanimous self-surrender was a wonderful token of the passionate admiration and love which the Apostle inspired, but its deepest motive was love to Christ and not to Paul only.

Faith in Christ and love to Him ought to turn cowards into heroes, to destroy thoughts of self, and to make the utmost self-sacrifice natural, blessed, and easy. We are not called upon to exercise heroism like Priscilla's and Aquila's, but there is as much heroism needed for persistently Christian life, in our prosaic daily circumstances, as has carried many a martyr to the block, and many a tremulous woman to the pyre. We can all be heroes; and if the love of Christ is in us, as it should be, we shall all be ready to 'yield ourselves living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service.'

Long years after, the Apostle, on the further edge of life, looked back over it all; and, whilst much had become dim, and some trusted friends had dropped away, like Demas, he saw these two, and waved them his last greeting before he turned to the executioner—'Salute Prisca and Aquila.' Paul's Master is not less mindful of His friends' love, or less eloquent in the praise of their faithfulness, or less sure to reward them with the crown of glory. 'Whoso confesseth Me before men, him will I also confess before the angels in heaven.'

TWO HOUSEHOLDS

'. . . Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household. 11. . . . Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.'—ROMANS xvi. 10, 11.

THERE does not seem much to be got out of these two sets of salutations to two households in Rome; but if we look at them with eyes in our heads, and some sympathy in our hearts, I think we shall get lessons worth the treasuring.

In the first place, here are two sets of people, members of two different households, and that means mainly, if not exclusively, slaves. In the next place, in each case there was but a section of the household which was Christian. In the third place, in neither household is the master included in the greeting. So in neither case was *he* a Christian.

We do not know anything about these two persons, men of position evidently, who had large households. But the most learned of our living English commentators of the New Testament has advanced a very reasonable conjecture in regard to each of them. As to the first of them, Aristobulus: that wicked old King Herod, in whose life Christ was born, had a grandson of the name, who spent all his life in Rome, and was in close relations with the Emperor of that day. He had died some little time before the writing of this letter. As to the second of them, there is a very notorious Narcissus, who plays a great part in the history of Rome just a little while before Paul's period there, and he, too, was dead. And it is more than probable that the slaves and retainers of these two men were transferred in both cases to the emperor's household and held together in it, being known as Aristobulus' men and Narcissus' men. And so probably the Christians among them are the brethren to whom these salutations are sent.

Be that as it may, I think that if we look at the two groups, we shall get out of them some lessons.

I. The first of them is this: the penetrating power of Christian truth. Think of the sort of man that the master of the first household was, if the identification suggested be accepted. He is one of that foul Herodian brood, in all of whom the bad Idumæan blood ran corruptly. The grandson of the old Herod, the brother of Agrippa of the Acts of the Apostles, the hanger-on of the Imperial Court, with Roman vices veneered on his native wickedness, was not the man to welcome the entrance of a revolutionary ferment into his household; and yet through his barred doors had crept quietly, he knowing nothing about it, that great message of a loving God, and a Master whose service was freedom. And in thousands of like cases the Gospel was finding its way underground, undreamed of by the great and wise, but steadily pressing onwards, and undermining all the towering grandeur that was so contemptuous of it. So Christ's truth spread at first; and I believe that is the way it always spreads. Intellectual revolutions begin at the top and filter down; religious revolutions begin at the bottom and rise; and it is always the 'lower orders' that are laid hold of first. 'Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called,' but a handful of slaves in Aristobulus' household, with this living truth lodged in their hearts, were the bearers and the witnesses and the organs of the power which was going to shatter all that towered above it and despised it. And so it always is.

Do not let us be ashamed of a Gospel that has not laid hold of the upper and the educated classes, but let us feel sure of this, that there is no greater sign of defective education and of superficial culture and of inborn vulgarity than despising the day of small things, and estimating truth by the position or the intellectual attainments of the men that are its witnesses and its lovers. The Gospel penetrated at first, and penetrates still, in the fashion that is suggested here.

II. Secondly, these two households teach us very touchingly and beautifully the uniting power of Christian sympathy.

A considerable proportion of the first of these two households would probably be Jews—if Aristobulus were indeed Herod's grandson. The probability that he was is increased by the greeting interposed between those to the two households—'Salute Herodion.' The name suggests some connection with Herod, and whether we suppose the designation of 'my kinsman,' which Paul gives him, to mean 'blood relation' or 'fellow countryman,' Herodion, at all events, was a Jew by birth. As to the other members of these households, Paul may have met some of them in his many travels, but he had never been in Rome, and his greetings are more probably sent to them as conspicuous sections, numerically, of the Roman Church, and as tokens of his affection, though he had never seen them. The possession of a common faith has bridged the gulf between him and them. Slaves in those days were outside the pale of human sympathy, and almost outside the pale of human rights. And here the foremost of Christian teachers, who was a freeman born, separated from these poor people by a tremendous chasm, stretches a brother's hand across it and grasps theirs. The Gospel that came into the world to rend old associations and to split up society, and to make a deep cleft between fathers and children and husband and wife, came also to more than counterbalance its dividing effects by its uniting power. And in that old world that was separated into classes by gulfs deeper than any of which we have any experience, it, and it alone, threw a bridge across the abysses and bound men together. Think of what a revolution it must have been, when a master and his slave could sit down together at the table of the Lord and look each other in the face and say 'Brother,' and for the moment forget the difference of bond and free. Think of what a revolution it must have been when Jew and Gentile could sit down together at the table of the Lord, and forget circumcision and uncircumcision, and feel that they were all one in Jesus Christ. And as for the third of the great clefts—that, alas! which made so much of the tragedy and the wickedness of ancient life—viz. the separation between the sexes—think of what a revolution it was when men and women, in all purity of the new bond of Christian affection, could sit down together at the same table, and feel that they were brethren and sisters in Jesus Christ.

The uniting power of the common faith and the common love to the one Lord marked Christianity as altogether supernatural and new, unique in the world's experience, and obviously requiring something more than a human force to produce it. Will anybody say that the Christianity of this day has preserved and exhibits that primitive demonstration of its superhuman source? Is there anything obviously beyond the power of earthly motives in the unselfish, expansive love of modern Christians? Alas! alas! to ask the question is to answer it, and everybody knows the answer, and nobody sorrows over it. Is any duty more pressingly laid upon Christian churches of this generation than that, forgetting their doctrinal janglings for a while, and putting away their sectarianisms and narrowness, they should show the world that their faith has still the power to do what it did in the old times, bridge over the gulf that separates class from class, and bring all men together in the unity of the faith and of the love of Jesus Christ? Depend upon it, unless the modern organisations of Christianity which call themselves 'churches' show themselves, in the next twenty years, a great deal more alive to the necessity, and a great deal more able to cope with the problem, of uniting the classes of our modern complex civilisation, the term of life of these churches is comparatively brief. And the form of Christianity which another century will see will be one which reproduces the old miracle of the early days, and reaches across the deepest clefts that separate modern society, and makes all one in Jesus Christ. It is all very well for us to glorify the ancient love of the early Christians, but there is a vast deal of false sentimentality about our eulogistic talk of it. It were better to praise it less and imitate it more. Translate it into present life, and you will find that to-day it requires what it nineteen hundred years ago was recognised as manifesting, the presence of something more than human motive, and something more than man discovers of truth. The cement must be divine that binds men thus together.

Again, these two households suggest for us the tranquillising power of Christian resignation.

They were mostly slaves, and they continued to be slaves when they were Christians. Paul recognised their continuance in the servile position, and did not say a word to them to induce them to break their bonds. The Epistle to the Corinthians treats the whole subject of slavery in a very remarkable fashion. It says to the slave: 'If you were a slave when you became a Christian, stop where you are. If you have an opportunity of being free, avail yourself of it; if you have not, never mind.' And then it adds this great principle: 'He that is called in the Lord, being a slave, is Christ's freeman. Likewise he that is called, being free, is Christ's slave.' The Apostle applies the very same principle, in the adjoining verses, to the distinction between circumcision and uncircumcision. From all which there comes just the same lesson that is taught us by these two households of slaves left intact by Christianity—viz. that where a man is conscious of a direct, individual relation to Jesus Christ, that makes all outward circumstances infinitely insignificant. Let us get up to the height, and they all become very small. Of course, the principles of Christianity killed slavery, but it took eighteen hundred years to do it. Of course, there is no blinking the fact that slavery was an essentially immoral and unchristian institution. But it is one thing to lay down principles and leave them to be worked in and then to be worked out, and it is another thing to go blindly charging at existing institutions and throwing them down by violence, before men have grown up to feel that they are wicked. And so the New Testament takes the wise course, and leaves the foolish one to foolish people. It makes the tree good, and then its fruit will be good.

But the main point that I want to insist upon is this: what was good for these slaves in Rome is good for you and me. Let us get near to Jesus Christ, and feel that we have got hold of His hand for our own selves, and we shall not mind very much about the possible varieties of human condition. Rich or poor, happy or sad, surrounded by companions or treading a solitary path, failures or successes as the world has it, strong or broken and weak and wearied—all these varieties, important as they are, come to be very small when we can say, 'We are the Lord's.' That amulet makes all things tolerable; and the Christian submission which is the expression of our love to, and confidence in, His infinite sweetness and unerring goodness, raises us to a height from which the varieties of earthly condition seem to blend and melt into one. When we are down amongst the low hills, it seems a long way from the foot of one of them to the top of it; but when we are on the top they all melt into one dead level, and you cannot tell which is top and which is bottom. And so, if we only can rise high enough up the hill, the possible diversities of our condition will seem to be very small variations in the level.

III. Lastly, these two groups suggest to us the conquering power of Christian faithfulness.

The household of Herod's grandson was not a very likely place to find Christian people in, was it? Such flowers do not often grow, or at least do not easily grow, on such dunghills. And in both these cases it was only a handful of the people, a portion of each household, that was Christian. So they had beside them, closely identified with them—working, perhaps, at the same tasks, I might almost say, chained with the same chains—men who had no share in their faith or in their love. It would not be easy to pray and love and trust God and do His will, and keep clear of complicity with idolatry and immorality and sin, in such a pigsty as that; would it? But these men did it. And nobody need ever say, 'I am in such circumstances that I cannot live a Christian life.' There are no such circumstances, at least none of God's appointing. There are often such that we bring upon ourselves, and then the best thing is to get out of them as soon as we can. But as far as He is concerned, He never puts anybody anywhere where he cannot live a holy life.

There were no difficulties too great for these men to overcome; there are no difficulties too great for us to overcome. And wherever you and I may be, we cannot be in any place where it is so hard to live a consistent life as these people were. Young men in warehouses, people in business here in Manchester, some of us with unfortunate domestic or relative associations, and so on—we may all feel as if it would be so much easier for us if this, that, and the other thing were changed. No, it would not be any easier; and perhaps the harder the easier, because the more obviously the atmosphere is poisonous, the more we shall put some cloth over our mouths to prevent it from getting into our lungs. The dangerous place is the place where the vapours that poison are scentless as well as invisible. But whatever be the difficulties, there is strength waiting for us, and we may all win the praise which the Apostle gives to another of these Roman brethren, whom he salutes as 'Apelles, approved in Christ'—a man that had been 'tried' and had stood his trial. So in our various spheres of difficulty and of temptation we may feel that the greeting from heaven, like Paul's message to the slaves in Rome, comes to us with good cheer, and that the Master Himself sees us, sympathises with us, salutes us, and stretches out His hand to help and to keep us.

TRYPHENA AND TRYPHOSA

'Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord.'—ROMANS xvi. 12.

THE number of salutations to members of the Roman Church is remarkable when we take into account that Paul had never visited it. The capital drew all sorts of people to it, and probably there had been personal intercourse between most of the persons here mentioned and the Apostle in some part of his wandering life. He not only displays his intimate knowledge of the persons saluted, but his beautiful delicacy and ingenuity in the varying epithets applied to them shows how in his great heart and tenacious memory individuals had a place. These shadowy saints live for ever by Paul's brief characterisation of them, and stand out to us almost as clearly and as sharply distinguished as they did to him.

These two, Tryphena and Tryphosa, were probably sisters. That is rendered likely by their being coupled together here, as well as by the similarity of their names. These names mean luxurious, or delicate, and no doubt expressed the ideal for their daughters which the parents had had, and possibly indicate the kind of life from which these two women had come. We can scarcely fail to note the contrast between the meaning of their names and the Christian lives they had lived. Two dainty women, probably belonging to a class in which a delicate withdrawal from effort and toil was thought to be the woman's distinctive mark, had fled from luxury, which often tended to be voluptuous, and was always self-indulgent, and had chosen the better part of 'labour in the Lord.' They had become untrue to their names, because they must be true to their Master and themselves. We may well take the lesson that lies here, and is eminently needful to-day amidst the senseless, and often sinful, tide of luxury which runs so strongly as to threaten the great and eternal Christian principle of self-denial.

The first thing that strikes us in looking at these salutations is the illustration which it gives of the uniting power of a common faith. Tryphena and Tryphosa were probably Roman ladies of some social standing, and their names may indicate that they at least inherited a tendency to exclusiveness; yet here they occur immediately after the household of Narcissus and in close connection with that of Aristobulus, both of which are groups of slaves. Aristobulus was a grandson of Herod the Great, and Narcissus was a well-known freedman, whose slaves at his death would probably become the property of the Emperor. Other common slave names are those of Ampliatus and Urbanus; and here in these lists they stand side by side with persons of some distinction in the Roman world, and with men and women of widely differing nationalities. The Church of Rome would have seemed to any non-Christian observer a motley crowd in which racial distinctions, sex, and social conditions had all been swept away by the rising tide of a common fanaticism. In it was exemplified in actual operation Paul's great principle that in Christ Jesus 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free, but in Him all are one.' Roman society in that day, as Juvenal shows us, was familiar with the levelling and uniting power of common vice and immorality, and the few sternly patriotic Romans who were left lamented that 'the Orontes flowed into the Tiber'; but such common wallowing in filth led to no real unity, whereas, in the obscure corner of the great city where there were members of the infant Church gathered together, there was the beginning of a common life in the one Lord which lifted each participant of it out of the dreary solitude of individuality, and imparted to each heart the tingling consciousness of oneness with all who held the one faith in the one Lord and had received the one baptism in the one Name. That fair dawn has been shadowed by many clouds, and the churches of to-day, however they may have developed doctrine, may look back with reproach and shame to the example of Rome, where Tryphena and Tryphosa, with all their inherited, fastidious delicacy, recognised in the household of Aristobulus and the household of Narcissus 'brethren in the Lord,' and were as glad to welcome Jews, Asiatics, Persians, and Greeks, as Romans of the bluest blood, into the family of Christ. The Romish Church of our day has lost its early grace of welcoming all who love the one Lord into its fellowship; and we of the Protestant churches have been but too swift to learn the bad lesson of forbidding all who follow not with us.

Another thought which may be suggested by Tryphena and Tryphosa is the blessed hallowing of natural family relations by common faith. They were probably sisters, or, at all events, as their names indicate, near relatives, and to them that faith must have been doubly precious because they shared it with each other. None of the trials to which the early Christians were exposed was more severe than the necessity which their Christianity so often imposed upon them of breaking the sacred family ties. It saddened even Christ's heart to think that He had come to rend families in sunder, and to make 'a man's foes them of his own household'; and we can little imagine how bitter the pang must have been when family love had to be cast aside at the bidding of allegiance to Him.

But though the stress of that separation between those most nearly related in blood by reason of unshared faith is alleviated in this day, it still remains; and that is but a feeble Christian life which does not feel that it is drawing a heart from closest human embraces and constituting a barrier between it and the dearest of earth. There is still need in these days of relaxed Christian sentiment for the stern austerity of the law, 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me'; and there are many Christian souls who would be infinitely stronger and more mature, if they did not yield to the seductions of family affections which are not rooted in Jesus Christ. But still, though our faith ought to be far more than it often is, the determining element in our affections and associations, its noblest work is not to separate but to unite; and whilst it often must divide, it is meant to draw more closely together hearts that are already knit by earthly love. Its legitimate effect is to make all earthly sweetnesses sweeter, all holy bonds more holy and more binding, to infuse a new constraint and preciousness into all earthly relationships, to make brothers tenfold more brotherly and sisters more sisterly. The heart, in which the deepest devotion is yielded to Jesus Christ, has its capacity for devotion infinitely increased, and they who, looking into each other's faces, see reflected there something of the Lord whom they both love, love each other all the more because they love Him most, and in their love to Him, and His to them, have found a new measure for all their affection. They who, looking on their dear ones, can 'trust they live in God,' will there find them 'worthier to be loved,' and will there find a new power of loving them. Tryphena and Tryphosa were more sisterly than ever when they clung to their Elder Brother. 'There is no man that hath left brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, for My sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold more in this time, brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and in the world to come eternal life.'

The contrast between the names of these two Roman ladies and the characterisation of their 'labour in the Lord' may suggest to us the most formidable foe of Christian earnestness. Their names, as we have already noticed, point to a state of society in which the parents' ideal for their daughters was dainty luxuriousness and a withdrawal from the rough and tumble of common life; but these two women, magnetised by the love of Jesus, had turned their backs on the parental ideal, and had cast themselves earnestly into a life of toil. That ideal was never more formidably antagonistic to the vigour of Christian life than it is to-day. Rome, in Paul's time, was not more completely honeycombed with worldliness than England is to-day; and the English churches are not far behind the English 'world' in their paralysing love of luxury and self-indulgence. In all ages, earnest Christians have had to take up the same vehement remonstrance against the tendency of the average Christian to let his religious life be weakened by the love of the world and the things of the world. The protests against growing luxury have been a commonplace in all ages of the Church; but, surely, there has never been a time when it has reached a more senseless, sinful, and destroying height than in our day. The rapid growth of wealth, with no capacity of using it nobly, which modern commerce has brought, has immensely influenced all our churches for evil. It is so hard for us, aggregated in great cities, to live our own lives, and the example of our class has such immense power over us that it is very hard to pursue the path of 'plain living and high thinking' in communities, all classes of which are more and more yielding to the temptation to ostentation, so-called comfort, and extravagant expenditure; and that this is a danger—we are tempted to say *the* danger—to the purity, loftiness, and vigour of religious life among us, he must be blind who cannot see, and he must be strangely ignorant of his own life who cannot feel that it is the danger for him. I believe that for one professing Christian whose earnestness is lost by reason of intellectual doubts, or by some grave sin, there are a hundred from whom it simply oozes away unnoticed, like wind out of a bladder, so that what was once round and full becomes limp and flaccid. If Demas begins with loving the present world, it will not be long before he finds a reason for departing from Paul.

We may take these two sisters, finally, as pointing for us the true victory over this formidable enemy. They had turned resolutely away from the heathen ideal enshrined in their names to a life of real hard toil, as is distinctly implied by the word used by the Apostle. What that toil consisted in we do not know, and need not inquire; but the main point to be noted is that their 'labour' was 'in the Lord.' That union with Christ makes labour for Him a necessity, and makes it possible. 'The labour we delight in physics pain'; and if we are in Him, we shall not only 'live in Him,' but all our work begun, continued, and ended in Him, will in Him and by Him be accepted. There is no victorious antagonist of worldly ease and self-indulgence comparable to the living consciousness of union with

Jesus and His life in us. To dwell in the swamps at the bottom of the mountain is to live in a region where effort is impossible and malaria weakens vitality; to climb the heights brings bracing to the limbs and a purer air into the expanding lungs, and makes work delightsome that would have been labour down below. If we are 'in the Lord,' He is our atmosphere, and we can draw from Him full draughts of a noble life in which we shall not need the stimulus of self-interest or worldly success to use it to the utmost in acts of service to Him. They who live in the Lord will labour in the Lord, and they who labour in the Lord will rest in the Lord.

PERSIS

'Salute the beloved Persis, who laboured much in the Lord.'—ROMANS xvi. 12.

THERE are a great number of otherwise unknown Christians who pass for a moment before our view in this chapter. Their characterisations are like the slight outlines in the background of some great artist's canvas: a touch of the brush is all that is spared for each, and yet, if we like to look sympathetically, they live before us. Now, this good woman, about whom we never hear again, and for whom these few words are all her epitaph—was apparently, judging by her name, of Persian descent, and possibly had been brought to Rome as a slave. At all events, finding herself there, she had somehow or other become connected with the Church in that city, and had there distinguished herself by continuous and faithful Christian toil which had won the affection of the Apostle, though he had never seen her, and knew no more about her. That is all. She comes into the foreground for a moment, and then she vanishes. What does she say to us?

First of all, like the others named by Paul, she helps us to understand, by her living example, that wonderful, new, uniting process that was carried on by means of Christianity. The simple fact of a Persian woman getting a loving message from a Jew, the woman being in Rome and the Jew in Corinth, and the message being written in Greek, brings before us a whole group of nationalities all fused together. They had been hammered together, or, if you like it better, chained together, by Roman power, but they were melted together by Christ's Gospel. This Eastern woman and this Jewish man, and the many others whose names and different nationalities pass in a flash before us in this chapter, were all brought together in Jesus Christ.

If we run our eye over these salutations, what strikes one, even at the first sight, is the very small number of Jewish names; only one certain, and another doubtful. Four or five names are Latin, and then all the rest are Greek, but this woman seemingly came from further east than any of them. There they all were, forgetting the hostile nationalities to which they belonged, because they had found One who had brought them into one great community. We talk about the uniting influence of Christianity, but when we see the process going on before us, in a case like this, we begin to understand it better.

But another point may be noticed in regard to this uniting process—how it brought into action the purest and truest love as a bond that linked men. There are four or five of the people commended in this chapter of whom the Apostle has nothing to say but that they are beloved. This is the only woman to whom he applies that term. And notice his instinctive delicacy: when he is speaking of men he says, '*My* beloved'; when he is greeting Persis he says, '*the* beloved,' that there may be no misunderstanding about the 'my'—'the beloved Persis which laboured much in the Lord'—indicating, by one delicate touch, the loftiness, the purity, and truly Christian character of the bond that held them together. And that is no true Church, where anything but that is the bond—the love that knits us to one another, because we believe that each is knit to the dear Lord and fountain of all love.

What more does this good woman say to us? She is an example living and breathing there before us, of what a woman may be in God's Church. Paul had never been in Rome; no Apostle, so far as we know, had had anything to do with the founding of the Church. The most important Church in the Roman Empire, and the Church which afterwards became the curse of Christendom, was founded by some anonymous Christians, with no commission, with no supervision, with no officials amongst them, but who just had the grace of God in their hearts, and found themselves in Rome, and could not help speaking about Jesus Christ. God helped them, and a little Church sprang into being. And the great abundance of salutations here, and the honourable titles which the Apostle gives to the Christians of whom he speaks, and many of whom he signalises as having done great service, are a kind of certificate on his part to the vigorous life which, without any apostolic supervision or official direction had developed itself there in that Church.

Now, it is to be noticed that this striking form of eulogium which is attached to our Persis she shares in common with others in the group. And it is to be further noticed that all those who are, as it were, decorated with this medal—on whom Paul bestows this honour of saying that they had 'laboured,' or 'laboured much in the Lord,' are women that stand alone in the list. There are several other women in it, but they are all coupled with men—husbands or brothers, or some kind of relative. But there are three sets of women, I do not say single women, but three sets of women, standing singly in the list, and it is about them, and them only, that Paul says they 'laboured,' or 'laboured much.' There is a Mary who stands alone, and she 'bestowed much labour on' Paul and others. Then there are, in the same verse as my text, two sisters, Tryphena and Tryphosa, whose names mean 'the luxurious.' And the Apostle seems to think, as he writes the two names that spoke of self-indulgence: 'Perhaps these rightly described these two women once, but they do not now. In the bad old days, before they were Christians, they may have been rightly named luxurious-living. But here is their name now, the luxurious is turned into the self-sacrificing worker, and the two sisters "labour in the Lord."' Then comes our friend Persis, who also stands alone, and she shares in the honour that only these other two companies of women share with her. She 'laboured much in the Lord.' In that little community, without any direction from Apostles and authorised teachers, the brethren and sisters had every one found their tasks; and these solitary women, with nobody to say to them, 'Go and do this or that,' had found out for themselves, or rather had been taught by the Spirit of Jesus, what they had to do, and they worked at it with a will. There are many things that Christian women can do a great deal better than men, and we are not to forget that this modern talk about the emancipation of women has its roots here in the New Testament. We are not to forget either that prerogative means obligation, and that the elevation of woman means the laying upon her of solemn duties to perform. I wonder how many of the women members of our Churches and congregations deserve such a designation as that? We hear a great deal about 'women's rights' nowadays. I wish some of my friends would lay a little more to heart than they do, 'women's duties.'

And now, lastly, the final lesson that I draw from this eulogium of an otherwise altogether unknown woman is that she is a model of Christian service.

First, in regard to its measure. She 'laboured much in the Lord.' Now, both these two words, 'laboured' and 'much,' are extremely emphatic. The word rightly translated 'laboured' will appear in its full force if I recall to you a couple of other places in which it is employed in the New Testament. You remember that touching incident about our Lord when, being '*wearied* with His journey, He sat thus on the well.' 'Wearied' is the same word as is here used. Then, you remember how the Apostle, after he had been hauling empty nets all night in the little, wet, dirty fishing-boat, said, perhaps with a yawn, 'Master, we have *toiled* all the night and caught nothing.' He uses the same word as is employed here. Such is the sort of work that these women had done—work carried to the point of exhaustion, work up to the very edge of their powers, work unsparing and continuous, and not done once in some flash of evanescent enthusiasm, but all through a dreary night, in spite of apparent failures.

There is the measure of service. Many of us seem to think that if we say 'I am tired,' that is a reason for not doing anything. Sometimes it is, no doubt; and no man has a right so to labour as to impair his capacity for future labour, but subject to that condition I do not know that the plea of fatigue is a sufficient reason for idleness. And I am quite sure that the true example for us is the example of Him who, when He was most wearied, sitting on the well, was so invigorated and refreshed by the opportunity of winning another soul that, when His disciples came back to Him, they looked at His fresh strength with astonishment, and said to themselves, 'Has any man brought Him anything to eat?' Ay, what He had to eat was work that He finished for the Father, and some of us know that the truest refreshment in toil is a change of toil. It is almost as good to shift the load on to the other shoulder, or to take a stick into the other hand, as it is to put away the load altogether. Oh, the careful limits which Christian people nowadays set to their work for Jesus! They are not afraid of being tired in their pursuit of business or pleasure, but in regard to Christ's work they will let anything go to wrack and ruin rather than that they should turn a hair, by persevering efforts to prevent it. Work to the limit of power if you live in the light of blessedness.

She 'laboured much in the Lord,' or, as Jesus Christ said about the other woman who was blamed by the people that did not love enough to understand the blessedness of self-sacrifice, 'she had done what she could.' It was an apology for the form of Mary's service, but it was a stringent demand as to its amount. 'What she could'—not *half* of what she could; not what she *conveniently* could. That is the measure of acceptable service.

Then, still further, may we not learn from Persis the spring of all true Christian work? She 'laboured much in the Lord,' because she *was* 'in Him,' and in union with Him there came to her power and desire to do things which, without that close fellowship, she neither would have desired nor been able to do. It is vain to try to whip up Christian people to forms of service by appealing to lower motives. There is only one motive that will last, and bring out from us all that is in us to do, and that is the appeal to our sense of union and communion with Jesus Christ, and the exhortation to live in Him, and then we shall work in Him. If you link the spindles in your mill, or the looms in your weaving-shed, with the engine, they will go. It is of no use to try to turn them by hand. You will only spoil the machinery, and it will be poor work that you will get off them.

So, dear brethren, be 'in the Lord.' That is the secret of service, and the closer we come to Him, and the more continuously, moment by moment, we realise our individual dependence upon Him, and our union with Him, the more will our lives effloresce and blossom into all manner of excellence and joyful service, and nothing else that Christian people are whipped up to do, from lower and more vulgar motives than that, will. It may be of a certain kind of inferior value, but it is far beneath the highest beauty of Christian service, nor will its issues reach the loftiest point of usefulness to which even our poor service may attain.

Persis seems to me to suggest, too, the safeguard of work. Ah, if she had not 'laboured in the Lord,' and been 'in the Lord' whilst she was labouring, she would very soon have stopped work. Our Christian work, however pure its motive when we begin it, has in itself the tendency to become mechanical, and to be done from lower motives than those from which it was begun. That is true about a man in my position. It is true about all of us, in our several ways of trying to serve our dear Lord and Master. Unless we make a conscience of continually renewing our communion with Him, and getting our feet once more firmly upon the rock, we shall certainly in our Christian work, having begun in the spirit, continue in the flesh, and before we know where we are, we shall be doing work from habit, because we did it yesterday at this hour, because people expect it of us, because A, B, or C does it, or for a hundred other reasons, all of which are but too familiar to us by experience. They are sure to slip in; they change the whole character of the work, and they harm the workers. The only way by which we can keep the garland fresh is by continually dipping it in the fountain. The only way by which we can keep our Christian work pure, useful, worthy of the Master, is by seeing to it that our work itself does not draw us away from our fellowship with Him. And the more we have to do, the more needful is it that we should listen to Christ's voice when He says to us, 'Come ye yourselves apart with Me into a solitary place, and there renew your communion with Me.'

The last lesson about our work which I draw from Persis is the unexpected immortality of true Christian service. How Persis would have opened her eyes if anybody had told her that nearly 1900 years after she lived, people in a far-away barbarous island would be sitting thinking about her, as you and I are doing now! How astonished she would have been if it had been said to her, 'Now, Persis, wheresoever in the whole world the Gospel is preached, your name and your work and your epitaph will go with it, and as long as men know about Jesus Christ, your and their Master, they will know about you, His humble servant.' Well, we shall not have our names in that fashion in men's memories, but Jesus will have your name and mine, if we do His work as this woman did it, in *His* memory. 'I will never forget any of their works.' And if we—self-forgetful to the limit of our power, and as the joyful result of our personal union with that Saviour who has done everything for us—try to live for His praise and glory in any fashion, then be sure of this, that our poor deeds are as immortal as Him for whom they are done, and that we may take to ourselves the great word which He has spoken, when He has declared that at the last He will confess His confessors' names before the angels in heaven. Blessed are the living that 'live in the Lord'; blessed are the workers that work 'in the Lord,' for when they come to be the dead that 'die in the Lord' and rest from their labours, their works shall follow them.

A CRUSHED SNAKE

'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.'—ROMANS xvi. 20.

THERE are three other Scriptural sayings which may have been floating in the Apostle's mind when he penned this triumphant assurance. 'Thou shalt bruise his head'; the great first Evangel—we are to be endowed with Christ's power; 'The lion and the adder thou shalt trample under foot'—all the strength that was given to ancient saints is ours; 'Behold! I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy'—the charter of the seventy is the perennial gift to the Church. Echoing all these great words, Paul promises the Roman Christians that 'the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.' Now, when any special characteristic is thus ascribed to God, as when He is called 'the God of patience' or 'the God of hope,' in the preceding chapter, the characteristic selected has some bearing on the prayer or promise following. For example, this same designation, 'the God of peace,' united with the other, 'that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,' is laid as the foundation of the prayer for the perfecting of the readers of the Epistle to the Hebrews in every good work. It is, then, because of that great name that the Apostle is sure, and would have his Roman brethren to be sure, that Satan shall shortly be bruised under their feet. No doubt there may have been some reference in Paul's mind to what he had just said about those who caused divisions in the Church; but, if there is such reference, it is of secondary importance. Paul is gazing on all the great things in God which make Him the God of peace, and in them all he sees ground for the confident hope that His power will be exerted to crush all the sin that breaks His children's peace.

Now the first thought suggested by these words is the solemn glimpse given of the struggle that goes on in every Christian soul.

Two antagonists are at hand-grips in every one of us. On the one hand, the 'God of peace,' on the other, 'Satan.' If you believe in the personality of the One, do not part with the belief in the personality of the other. If you believe that a divine power and Spirit is ready to help and strengthen you, do not think so lightly of the enemies that are arrayed against you as to falter in the belief that there *is* a great personal Power, rooted in evil, who is warring against each of us. Ah, brethren! we live far too much on the surface, and we neither go down deep enough to the dark source of the Evil, nor rise high enough to the radiant Fountain of the Good. It is a shallow life that strikes that antagonism of God and Satan out of itself. And though the belief in a personal tempter has got to be very unfashionable nowadays, I am going to venture to say that you may measure accurately the vitality and depth of a man's religion by the emphasis with which he grasps the thought of that great antagonism. There is a star of light, and there is a star of darkness; and they revolve, as it were, round one centre.

But whilst, on the one hand, our Christianity is made shallow in proportion as we ignore this solemn reality, on the other hand, it is sometimes paralysed and perverted by our misunderstanding of it. For, notice, 'the God of peace shall bruise Satan *under your feet.*' Yes, it is God that bruises, but He uses our feet to do it. It is God from whom the power comes, but the power works through us, and we are neither merely the field, nor merely the prize, of the conflict between these two, but we ourselves have to put all our pith into the task of keeping down the flat, speckled head that has the poison gland in it. 'The God of peace'—blessed be His Name—'shall bruise Satan under your feet,' but it will need the tension of your muscles, and the downward force of your heel, if the wriggling reptile is to be kept under.

Turn, now, to the other thought that is here, the promise and pledge of victory in the name, the God of peace. I have already referred to two similar designations of God in the previous chapter, and if we take them in union with this one in our text, what a wonderfully beautiful and strengthening threefold view of that divine nature do we get! 'The God of patience and consolation' is the first of the linked three. It heads the list, and blessed is it that it does, because, after all, sorrow makes up a very large proportion of the experience of us all, and what most men seem to themselves to need most is a God that will bear their sorrows with them and help them to bear, and a God that will comfort them. But, supposing that He has been made known thus as the source of endurance and the God of all consolation, He becomes 'the God of hope,' for a dark background flings up a light foreground, and a comforted sorrow patiently endured is mighty to produce a radiant hope. The rising of the muddy waters of the Nile makes the heavy crops of 'corn in Egypt.' So the name 'the God of hope' fitly follows the name 'the God of patience and consolation.'

Then we come to the name in my text, built perhaps on the other two, or at least reminiscent of them, and recalling them, 'the God of peace,' who, through patience and consolation, through hope, and through many another gift, breathes the benediction of His own great tranquillity and unruffled calm over our agitated, distracted, sinful hearts. In connection with one of those previous designations to which I have referred, the Apostle has a prayer very different in form from this, but identical in substance, when he says 'the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing' Is not that closely allied to the promise of my text, 'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly'? Is there any surer way of 'bruising Satan' under a man's feet than filling him 'with joy and peace in believing'? What can the Devil do to that man? If his soul is saturated, and his capacities filled, with that pure honey of divine joy, will he have any taste for the coarse dainties, the leeks and the garlic, that the Devil offers him? Is there any surer way of delivering a man from the temptations of his own baser nature, and the solicitations of this busy intrusive world round about him, than to make him satisfied with the goodness of the Lord, and conscious in his daily experience of 'all joy and peace'? Fill the vessel with wine, and there is no room for baser liquors or for poison. I suppose that the way by which you and I, dear friends, will most effectually conquer any temptations, is by falling back on the superior sweetness of divine joys. When we live upon manna we do not crave onions. So He 'will bruise Satan under your feet' by giving that which will arm your hearts against all his temptations and all his weapons. Blessed be God for the way of conquest, which is the possession of a supremer good!

But then, notice how beautifully too this name, 'the God of peace,' comes in to suggest that even in the strife there may be tranquillity. I remember in an old church in Italy a painting of an Archangel with his foot on the dragon's neck, and his sword thrust through its scaly armour. It is perhaps the feebleness of the artist's hand, but I think rather it is the clearness of his insight, which has led him to represent the victorious angel, in the moment in which he is slaying the dragon, as with a smile on his face, and not the least trace of effort in the arm, which is so easily smiting the fatal blow. Perhaps if the painter could have used his brush better he would have put more expression into the attitude and the face, but I think it is better as it is. We, too, may achieve a conquest over the dragon which, although it requires effort, does not disturb peace. There is a possibility of bruising that slippery head under my foot, and yet not having to strain myself in the process. We may have 'peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation.' Do you remember how the Apostle, in another place, gives us the same beautiful—though at first sight contradictory—combination when he says, 'The peace of God shall garrison your heart'?

'My soul! there is a country
Far, far beyond the stars,
Where stands an armed sentry,
All skilful in the wars.'

And her name is Peace, as the poet goes on to tell us. Ah, brethren! if we lived nearer the Lord, we should find it more possible to 'fight the good fight of faith,' and yet to have 'our feet shod with the preparedness of the gospel of peace.'

'The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet'; and in bruising He will give you His peace to do it, and His peace in doing it, and in still greater measure after doing it. For every struggle of the Christian soul adds something to the subsequent depth of its tranquillity. And so the name of the God of peace is our pledge of victory in, and of deepened peace after, our warfare with sin and temptation.

Lastly, note the swiftness with which Paul expects that this process shall be accomplished.

I dare say that he was thinking about the coming of the Lord, when all the fighting and struggle would be over, and that when he said 'God shall bruise him under your feet shortly,' there lay in the back of his mind the thought, 'the Lord is at hand.' But be that as it may, there is another way of looking at the words. They are not in the least like our experience, are they? 'Shortly!'—and here am I, a Christian man for the last half century perhaps; and have I got much further on in my course? Have I brought the sin that used to trouble me much down, and is my character much more noble, Christ-like, than it was long years ago? Would other people say that it is? Instead of 'shortly' we ought to put 'slowly' for the most of us. But, dear friend, the ideal is swift conquest, and it is our fault and our loss, if the reality is sadly different.

There are a great many evils that, unless they are conquered suddenly, have very small chance of ever being conquered at all. You never heard of a man being cured of his love of intoxicating drink, for instance, by a gradual process. The serpent's life is not crushed out of it by gradual pressure, but by one vigorous stamp of a nervous heel.

But if my experience as a Christian man does not enable me to set to my seal that this text is true, the text itself will tell me why. It is 'the God of peace' that is going to 'bruise Satan.' Do you keep yourself in touch with Him, dear friend? And do you let His powers come uninterruptedly and continuously into your spirit and life? It is sheer folly and self-delusion to wonder that the medicine does not work as quickly as was promised, if you do not take the medicine. The slow process by which, at the best, many Christian people 'bruise Satan under their feet,' during which he hurts their heels more than they hurt his head, is mainly due to their breaking the closeness and the continuity of their communion with God in Jesus Christ.

But, after all, it is Heaven's chronology that we have to do with here. 'Shortly,' and it will be 'shortly,' if we reckon by heavenly scales of duration. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.' 'The Lord will help her, and that right early.' 'The Lord is at hand.' When we get yonder, ah! how all the long years of fighting will have dwindled down, and we shall say 'the Lord did help me, and that right early,' and though there may have been more than threescore years and ten of fighting, that, while we were in the thick of it, did not seem to come to much, we shall then look back and say: 'Yes, Lord, it was but for a moment, and it has brought me to the undying day of Eternal Peace.'

TERTIUS

'I, Tertius, who write the epistle, salute you in the Lord.'—Romans xvi. 22 (R.V.).

One sometimes sees in old religious pictures, in some obscure corner, a tiny kneeling figure, the portrait of the artist. So Tertius here gets leave to hold the pen for a moment on his own account, and from Corinth sends his greeting to his unknown brethren in Rome. Apparently he was a stranger to them, and needed to introduce himself. He is never heard of before or since. For one brief moment he is visible, like a star of a low magnitude, shining out for a moment between two banks of darkness and then swallowed up. Judging by his name, he was probably a Roman, and possibly had some connection with Italy, but clearly was a stranger to the Church in Rome. We do not know whether he was a resident in Corinth, where he wrote this epistle, or one of Paul's travelling companions. Probably he was the former, as his name never recurs in any of Paul's letters. One can understand the impulse which led him for one moment to come out of obscurity and to take up personal relations with those who had so long enjoyed his pen. He would fain float across the deep gulf of alienation a thread of love which looked like gossamer, but has proved to be stronger than centuries and revolutions.

This humble and modest greeting is an expression of a sentiment which the world may smile at, but which, being 'in the Lord,' partakes of immortality. No doubt the world's hate drove more closely together all the disciples in primitive times; but the yearning of Tertius for some little corner in the love of his Roman brethren might well influence us to-day. There ought to be an effort of imagination going out towards unknown brethren. Christian love is not meant to be kept within the limits of sight and personal knowledge; it should overleap the narrow bounds of the communities to which we belong, and expatiate over the whole wide field. The great Shepherd has prescribed for us the limits to the very edge of which our Christian love should consciously go forth, and has rebuked the narrowness to which we are prone, when He has said, 'Other sheep I have which are not of this fold.' We are all too prone to let identities of opinion and of polity, or even the accident of locality, set bounds to our consciousness of brotherhood; and the example of this little gush of affection, that reaches out a hand across the ocean and grasps the hands of unknown partakers in the common life of the one Lord, may well shame us out of our narrowness, and quicken us into a wide perception and deepened feeling towards all who in every place call up Jesus Christ as their Lord—'both their Lord and ours.'

Another lesson which we may learn from Tertius' characterisation of himself is the dignity of subordinate work towards a great end. His office as amanuensis was very humble, but it was quite as necessary as Paul's inspired fervour. It is to him that we owe our possession of the Epistle; it is to him that Paul owed it that he was able to record in imperishable words the thoughts that welled up in his mind, and would have been lost if Tertius had not been at his side. The power generated in the boilers does its work through machines of which each little cog-wheel is as indispensable as the great shafts. Members of the body which seem to be 'more feeble, are necessary.' Every note in a great concerted piece of music, and every instrument, down to the triangle and the little drum in the great orchestra, is necessary. This lesson of the dignity of subordinate work needs to be laid to heart both by those who think themselves to be capable of more important service, and by those who have to recognise that the less honourable tasks are all for which they are fit. To the former it may preach humility, the latter it may encourage. We are all very ignorant of what is great and what is small in the matter of our Christian service, and we have sometimes to look very closely and to clear away a great many vulgar misconceptions before we can clearly discriminate between mites and talents. 'We know not which may prosper, whether this or that'; and in our ignorance of what it may please God to bring out of any service faithfully rendered to Him, we had better not be too sure that true service is ever small, or that the work that attracts attention and is christened by men 'great' is really so in His eyes. It is well to have the noble ambition to 'desire earnestly the greater gifts,' but it is better to 'follow the more excellent way,' and to seek after the love which knows nothing of great or small, and without which prophecy and the knowledge of all mysteries, and all conspicuous and all the shining qualities profit nothing.

We can discern in Tertius' words a little touch of what we may call pride in his work. No doubt he knew it to be subordinate, but he also knew it to be needful; and no doubt he had put all his strength into doing it well. No man will put his best into any task which he does not undertake in such a spirit. It is a very plain piece of homely wisdom that 'what is worth doing at all is worth doing well.' Without a lavish expenditure of the utmost care and effort, our work will tend to be slovenly and unpleasing to God, and man, and to ourselves. We may be sure there were no blots and bits of careless writing in Tertius' manuscript, and that he would not have claimed the friendly feelings of his Roman brethren, if he had not felt that he had put his best into the writing of this epistle. The great word of King David has a very wide application. 'I will not take that which is thine for the Lord, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.'

Tertius' salutation may suggest to us the best thing by which to be remembered. All his life before and after the hours spent at Paul's side has sunk in oblivion. He wished to be known only as having written the Epistle. Christian souls ought to desire to live chiefly in the remembrance of those to whom they have been known as having done some little bit of work for Jesus Christ. We may well ask ourselves whether there is anything in our lives by which we should thus wish to be remembered. All our many activities will sink into silence; but if the stream of our life, which has borne along down its course so much mud and sand, has brought some grains of gold in the form of faithful and loving service to Christ and men—these will not be lost in the ocean, but treasured by Him. What we do for Jesus and to spread the knowledge of His name is the immortal part of our mortal lives, and abides in His memory and in blessed results in our own characters, when all the rest that made our busy and often stormy days has passed into oblivion. All that we know of Tertius who wrote this Epistle is that he wrote it. Well will it be for us if the summary of our lives be something like that of his!

QUARTUS A BROTHER

'Quartus a brother.'—ROMANS xvi. 23.

I AM afraid very few of us read often, or with much interest, those long lists of names at the end of Paul's letters. And yet there are plenty of lessons in them, if anybody will look at them lovingly and carefully. There does not seem much in these three words; but I am very much mistaken if they will not prove to be full of beauty and pathos, and to open out into a wonderful revelation of what Christianity is and does, as soon as we try to freshen them up into some kind of human interest.

It is easy for us to make a little picture of this brother Quartus. He is evidently an entire stranger to the Church in Rome. They had never heard his name before: none of them knew anything about him. Further, he is evidently a man of no especial reputation or position in the Church at Corinth, from which Paul writes. He contrasts strikingly with the others who send salutations to Rome. 'Timotheus, my workfellow'—the companion and helper of the Apostle, whose name was known everywhere among the Churches, heads the list. Then come other prominent men of his more immediate circle. Then follows a loving greeting from Paul's amanuensis, who, naturally, as the pen is in his own hand, says: '*I*, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.' Then Paul begins again to dictate, and the list runs on. Next comes a message from 'Gaius mine host, and of the whole Church'—an influential man in the community, apparently rich, and willing, as well as able, to extend to them large and loving hospitality. Erastus, the chamberlain or treasurer of the city, follows—a man of consequence in Corinth. And then, among all these people of mark, comes the modest, quiet Quartus. He has no wealth like Gaius, nor civic position like Erastus, nor wide reputation like Timothy. He is only a good, simple, unknown Christian. He feels a spring of love open in his heart to these brethren far across the sea, whom he never met. He would like them to know that he thought lovingly of them, and to be lovingly thought of by them. So he begs a little corner in Paul's letter, and gets it;

and there, in his little niche, like some statue of a forgotten saint, scarce seen amidst the glories of a great cathedral, 'Quartus a brother' stands to all time.

The first thing that strikes me in connection with these words is, how deep and real they show that new bond of Christian love to have been.

A little incident of this sort is more impressive than any amount of mere talk about the uniting influence of the Gospel. Here we get a glimpse of the power in actual operation in a man's heart, and if we think of all that this simple greeting presupposes and implies, and of all that had to be overcome before it could have been sent, we may well see in it the sign of the greatest revolution that was ever wrought in men's relations to one another. Quartus was an inhabitant of Corinth, from which city this letter was written. His Roman name may indicate Roman descent, but of that we cannot be sure. Just as probably he may have been a Greek by birth, and so have had to stretch his hand across a deep crevasse of national antipathy, in order to clasp the hands of his brethren in the great city. There was little love lost between Rome, the rough imperious conqueror, and Corinth, prostrate and yet restive under her bonds, and nourishing remembrances of a freedom which Rome had crushed, and of a culture that Rome haltingly followed.

And how many other deep gulfs of separation had to be bridged before that Christian sense of oneness could be felt! It is impossible for us to throw ourselves completely back to the condition of things which the Gospel found. The world then was like some great field of cooled lava on the slopes of a volcano, all broken up by a labyrinth of clefts and cracks, at the bottom of which one can see the flicker of sulphurous flames. Great gulfs of national hatred, of fierce enmities of race, language, and religion; wide separations of social condition, far profounder than anything of the sort which we know, split mankind into fragments. On the one side was the freeman, on the other, the slave; on the one side, the Gentile, on the other, the Jew; on the one side, the insolence and hard-handedness of Roman rule, on the other, the impotent, and therefore envenomed, hatred of conquered peoples.

And all this fabric, full of active repulsions and disintegrating forces, was bound together into an artificial and unreal unity by the iron clamp of Rome's power, holding up the bulging walls that were ready to fall—the unity of the slave-gang manacled together for easier driving. Into this hideous condition of things the Gospel comes, and silently flings its clasping tendrils over the wide gaps, and binds the crumbling structure of human society with a new bond, real and living. We know well enough that that was so, but we are helped to apprehend it by seeing, as it were, the very process going on before our eyes, in this message from 'Quartus a brother.'

It reminds us that the very notion of humanity, and of the brotherhood of man, is purely Christian. A world-embracing society, held together by love, was not dreamt of before the Gospel came; and since the Gospel came it is more than a dream. If you wrench away the idea from its foundation, as people do who talk about fraternity, and seek to bring it to pass without Christ, it is a mere piece of Utopian sentiment —a fine dream. But in Christianity it worked. It works imperfectly enough, God knows. Still there is some reality in it, and some power. The Gospel first of all produced the thing and the practice, and then the theory came afterwards. The Church did not talk much about the brotherhood of man, or the unity of the race; but simply ignored all distinctions, and gathered into the fold the slave and his master, the Roman and his subject, fair-haired Goths and swarthy Arabians, the worshippers of Odin and of Zeus, the Jew and the Gentile. That actual unity, utterly irrespective of all distinctions, which came naturally in the train of the Gospel, was the first attempt to realise the oneness of the race, and first taught the world that all men were brethren.

And before this simple word of greeting could have been sent, and the unknown man in Corinth felt love to a company of unknown men in Rome, some profound new impulse must have been given to the world; something altogether unlike any of the forces hitherto in existence. What was that? What should it be but the story of One who gave Himself for the whole world, who binds men into a unity because of His common relation to them all, and through whom the great proclamation can be made: 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.' Brother Quartus' message, like some tiny flower above-ground which tells of a spreading root beneath, is a modest witness to that mighty revolution, and presupposes the preaching of a Saviour in whom he and his unseen friends in Rome are one.

So let us learn not to confine our sympathy and the play of our Christian affection within the limits of our personal knowledge. We must go further a-field than that. Like this man, let us sometimes send our thoughts across mountains and seas. He knew nobody in the Roman Church, and nobody knew him, but he wished to stretch out his hand to them, and to feel, as it were, the pressure of their fingers in his palm. That is a pattern for us.

Let me suggest another thing. Quartus was a Corinthian. The Corinthian Church was remarkable for its quarrellings and dissensions. One said, 'I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ.' I wonder if our friend Quartus belonged to any of these parties? There is nothing more likely than that he had a much warmer glow of Christian love to the brethren over there in Rome than to those who sat on the same bench with him in the upper room at Corinth. For you know that sometimes it is true about people, as well as about scenery, that 'distance lends enchantment to the view.' A great many of us have much keener sympathies with 'brethren' who are well out of our reach, and whose peculiarities do not jar against ours, than with those who are nearest. I do not say Quartus was one of these, but he may very well have been one of the wranglers in Corinth who found it much easier to love his brother whom he had not seen than his brother whom he had seen. So take the hint, if you need it. Do not let your Christian love go wandering away abroad only, but keep some for home consumption.

Again, how simply, and with what unconscious beauty, the deep reason for our Christian unity is given in that one word, a 'Brother.' As if he had said, Never mind telling them anything about what I am, what place I hold, or what I do. Tell them I am a brother, that will be enough. It is the only name by which I care to be known; it is the name which explains my love to them.

We are brethren because we are sons of one Father. So that favourite name, by which the early Christians knew each other, rested upon and proclaimed the deep truth that they knew themselves to be all partakers of a common life derived from one Parent. When they said they were brethren, they implied, 'We have been born again by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.' The great Christian truth of regeneration, the communication of a divine life from God the Father, through Christ the Son, by the Holy Spirit, is the foundation of Christian brotherhood. So the name is no mere piece of effusive sentiment, but expresses a profound fact. 'To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God,' and therein to become the brethren of all His sons.

That is the true ground of our unity, and of our obligation to love all who are begotten of Him. You cannot safely put them on any other footing. All else—identity of opinion, similarity of practice and ceremonial, local or national ties, and the like—all else is insufficient. It may be necessary for Christian communities to require in addition a general identity of opinion, and even some uniformity in government and form of worship; but if ever they come to fancy that such subordinate conditions of visible oneness are the grounds of their spiritual unity, and to enforce these as such, they are slipping off the real foundation, and are perilling their character as Churches of Christ. The true ground of the unity of all Christians is here: 'Have we not all one Father?' We possess a kindred life derived from Him. We are a family of brethren because we are sons.

Another remark is, how strangely and unwittingly this good man has got himself an immortality by that passing thought of his. One loving message has won for him the prize for which men have joyfully given life itself,—an eternal place in history. Wheresoever the Gospel is preached there also shall this be told as a memorial of him. How much surprised he would have been if, as he leaned forward to Tertius hurrying to end his task and said, 'Send my love too,' anybody had told him that that one act of his would last as long as the world, and his name be known for ever! And how much ashamed some of the other people in the New Testament would have been if they had known that their passing faults—the quarrel of Euodia and Syntyche for instance—were to be gibbeted for ever in the same fashion! How careful they would have been, and we would be, of our behaviour if we knew that it was to be pounced down upon and made immortal in that style! Suppose you were to be told —Your thoughts and acts to-morrow at twelve o'clock will be recorded for all the world to read—you would be pretty careful how you behaved. When a speaker sees the reporters in front of him, he weighs his words.

Well, Quartus' little message is written down here, and the world knows it. All our words and works are getting put down too, in another Book up there, and it is going to be read out one day. It does seem wonderful that you and I should live as we do, knowing that all the while that God is recording it all. If we are not ashamed to do things, and let Him note them on His tablets that they may be for the time to come, for ever and ever, it is strange that we should be more careful to attitudinise and pose ourselves before one another than before Him. Let us then keep ever in mind 'those pure eyes and perfect witness of the all-judging' God. The eternal record of this little message is only a symbol of the eternal life and eternal record of all our transient and trivial thoughts and deeds before Him. Let us live so that each act, if recorded, would shine with some modest ray of true light like brother Quartus' greeting, and let us seek that, like him,—all else about us being forgotten, position, talents, wealth, buried in the dust,—we may be remembered, if we are remembered at all, by such a biography as is condensed into these three words. Who would not wish to be embalmed, so to speak, in such a record? Who would not wish to have such an epitaph as this? A sweet fate to live for ever in the world's memory by three words which tell his name, his Christianity, and his brotherly love! So far as we are remembered at all, may the like be our life's history and our epitaph!

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